

## FROM THE MEDIEVAL CORRESPONDENCE OF HUNGARIAN NOBLEWOMEN

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This paper focuses on a specific kind of medieval written source - the letters of private people. In particular, the author focuses on a group of private letters written by Hungarian noble women. It explores the possibilities of using these letters for historical and genealogical research while also looking at themes such as the history of education and schooling, as well as the everyday lives of the medieval nobility. The author analysed ten letters and managed to identify a number of people in the process, who were previously unknown in the genealogy of specific noble families. Different connections and relationships were identified that had previously been unknown in Slovak and Hungarian historiography. By looking at the development of education and the knowledge of writing in the Hungarian Empire, the author sheds light on when and why the writing of private letters became part of everyday life for female Hungarian nobles and not just their male counterparts. The paper provides a unique view into the lives of medieval Hungarian noble women, through the study of their own words, letters and personal writings.

Key words: Middle-Ages, Letters, Nobility, Genealogy, Private correspondence, Education.

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*“Beloved Katherine, do not worry about anything. God controls it all. May God preserve our health.”* Ban Francis Batthyány (Battyányi) ended his letter to his wife, Mrs. Katherine, with these words, sent from the military camp in Medjurić (in Hungarian – Vas megye, near the Kőrös County, in Croatia) on July 17, 1526. Francis was constantly in contact with her, during the entire preparations for the fight against the Ottomans, which culminated on August 29 in the Battle of Mohács. He added a handwritten encouragement in Hungarian to the letter written in Latin (*manu propria*), that he apparently wrote in difficult times, full of uncertainty, rather for himself than for his wife. He expressed his private feelings in the language he knew best.<sup>1</sup> At the very end of the Middle Ages,

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<sup>1</sup> “zerethe kata ne bankogyal semmit Jsten mind jól agya isten agya jo eegeseg be lasvk eg mast.” Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives) – Országos Levéltár (Na-

we have the possibility to observe correspondence between two close people, whose aim was, not only in time of war, but also in time of peace, to inform each other about their present state, their private feelings, fears, joys, but often about the current situation in the kingdom. It is for this reason that letters – *litterae causales* (closed with seals) or *litterae missiles* (sent through messengers) – have become an important source of historical evidence, which often complements our knowledge of the medieval history of the Kingdom of Hungary, known primarily from authentic documents and narrative sources. Letters are also a valuable source of information about the private lives of their senders and recipients. The preserved medieval correspondence of the Hungarian nobility also expands our knowledge of the genealogy of the studied families. We learn about specific family relationships, kinships and friendly contacts from these letters, which are often unknown or unforeseen from other sources. By examining the preserved letters, we also get closer to the everyday life of the medieval Hungarian nobility. Their life recorded in credible documents acquires another, more personal dimension. Even in the Middle Ages as in the years after, private letters primarily provide factual and valid information at the time. The content of the preserved letters contains the most frequent information on common or, on the contrary, also exceptional issues, which were, however, of temporary importance. They were primary of a confidential nature for both the sender and the addressee and were not intended for other hands. The level of this information and its written submission is proportional to the education, maturity and experience of the letter's sender.

The aim of the study is to capture written communication in the environment of the medieval Hungarian nobility, especially between Hungarian noblewomen. The preserved letters, whose senders and addressees are exclusively women, bring a rare opportunity to look into their world at such moments when they expressed primarily their own interests, without the influence of their male relatives. These situations are extremely rare because we almost always follow the lives of medieval women from other written sources as if from the perspective of their male relatives (especially of a father and a husband, later possibly of a son). Eventually, this is evident by most of the preserved medieval letters, which were

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tional Archive) (MNL OL), Diplomatikai levéltár (Collection of documents) (DL) 104469. Francis was the Ban of Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia from 1525 to 1526. C. TÓTH, Norbert et al. *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1458–1526. I. Főpapok és barók* [Secular archeology of Hungary 1458–1526 I. Prelates and barons]. Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2017, p. 101. ISBN 978-963-416-035-9. At the time of the impending battle with the Ottomans, he wrote several letters to his wife, informing her of the preparations for the battle and the movement of his army. At the same time, he kept asking her to send money for military expenses. See for example MNL OL DL 104814 (a letter dated August 1, 1526).

sent or addressed by women, but they were in written contact with their male relatives or acquaintances (as well as with their familiar).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, even these letters still allow us to look into the private life of medieval noblewomen, who are in varying positions in medieval society. Therefore, they will not escape our attention and we will point out some examples in the text.<sup>3</sup> But before we discuss the letters of the Hungarian noblewomen directly, we will briefly clarify the nature and the state of preservation of the medieval letters, as well as the development of education and the related teaching of writing, especially in the environment of the Hungarian nobility.

We encounter the first preserved letters in the Kingdom of Hungary in its early history. During this period, they were exclusively connected with the royal court environment or with the courts of prelates. The authors of these letters were the highest representatives of the kingdom, from the Hungarian rulers who addressed their letters to prelates or to the rulers of other kingdoms, as well as the dignitaries at the royal court, who exchanged letters among each other.<sup>4</sup> It is unambiguous that, in these cases, the letters were written by scribes who worked in the service of the dignitaries. These scribes were most often trained in one of the monastic schools and came mainly from the Church environment.

With the development of culture and education in the 14th century, the art of writing became more accessible to secular people. Due to this fact, letters from nobles began to appear among the preserved sources. These letters had nothing to do with nobles' office, nor did their authors serve the king. This was undoubtedly related to the development of literacy in the kingdom, associated with the establishment of schools in the urban environment.<sup>5</sup> Schools were established either at the parishes and were visited mainly by the sons of the burghers or at chapters, which also attracted members of the nobility. Thus, primary education became accessible to laypeople, especially since the 14th

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- 2 Overall, dominant among the preserved medieval private letters are those exchanged between male members of the Hungarian nobility.
  - 3 The study does not aim to process letters as a subject of diplomatic or palaeographic research, nor does it seek to assess the level of literacy of the medieval nobility on the basis of the letters' analysis.
  - 4 *Árpád-kori és Anjou-kori levelek XI. – XIV. század* [Letters from the reign of the Arpads and Anjou from XI. – XIV. century]. Sajtó alá rendezte Makkai László és Mezey László. Budapest: Gondolat kiadó, 1960, p. 85–168.
  - 5 At the same time and with the same intensity, the letters of burghers and city councils were beginning to appear, which were exchanged between individual burghers, cities, towns and nobles, having property in the vicinity of cities, etc. More in DVORÁKOVÁ, Daniela. Vyslanci, poslovia, vyzvedači, špehovia – o spôsoboch šírenia informácií v stredoveku [Envoys, messengers, snoopers and spies – on the forms of diffusion of information in the Middle Ages]. In LUKÁČKA, Ján – ŠTEFÁNIK, Martin (eds.). *Stredoveké mesto ako miesto stretnutí a komunikácie*. Bratislava: VEDA, 2010, p. 125–134. ISBN 978-80-970302-1-6.

century, when we may see an increase in the establishment of town-parish and town-chapter schools. It was sought by such students (or rather by the parents of these students), whose intention was to acquire knowledge necessary for the practice of the secular profession, such as the profession of a scribe in the service of the higher nobility. The nobility was also interested in education, including basic knowledge of the subject of *dictamen*, where students learned to write and create documents of various kinds from the very beginning, although perhaps not to such an extent. Members of the lower nobility were educated in town schools in order to prepare for a career in an office, graduates of chapter schools for the careers of canons or other Church dignitaries. Members of the higher nobility were educated with the ambition to continue their studies at the university, or, especially by acquiring skills of reading and writing, to gain a better position at the royal court. An equally important reason for the nobility to learn how to write and draft documents was the desire to communicate and maintain at least written contact with their loved ones who had to leave the house for duties (due to property management or duties at the royal court or on the battlefield) or, on the contrary, with those who stayed at home.

One of the first documents on the education of the nobility in town schools appearing in the letter, which also indirectly complements our knowledge of the medieval correspondence of Hungarian noblewomen, was a letter from Dominic Litteratus from 1363, addressed to his close relative (*consobrinus*, cousin or aunt), Mrs. Clara, the wife of Michael *de Semyen*. The adjective, Litteratus, as Dominic referred to himself in the letter (*Dominicus litteratus*), belonged to the aristocratic scholars of the time and he probably completed part of his studies in one of the then existing chapter, monastic or parish schools. In the Middle Ages, this adjective was used to describe people who mastered writing, the science of drafting documents, and possessed the knowledge contained in the seven liberal arts (trivium: grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). Given that Dominic addressed his letter from Visegrád (in today's Hungary); it is assumed that he attended one of the schools in this town. There was a Benedictine monastic school and a parish-town school at that time. Dominic wrote to his relative that he would like to increase his level of education, which should be achieved by the purchase of a book from Boneti, by which he probably meant the late Roman author Boethius, already known as the first scholastic in the Middle Ages. The final greeting in his letter *Valete in eo, qui sub typo Ysac est immolatus in Cruce*, which he probably learned from one of the books, is also interesting.<sup>6</sup>

6 *Árpád-kori*, ref. 3, p. 248, no. 150, p. 362–363; FEJÉR, Georgius (ed.). *Codex diplomaticus hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis* (CDH) I. – XI., Budae 1829–1844. CDH XI/3, p. 378, no. CCV.

Siblings Nicolas and Ladislaus of Rum (Vas County) greeted their parents through a letter written in Győr (in today's Hungary) from their place of study in 1451. This is indirectly indicated through the introductory words of their letter, as they tried to convince their parents that they were studying really hard. They wrote to their loved ones precisely to make their stay easier and to send them the necessary things – coats, money and even a cow, as the boys really loved the milk. They had already promised this cow to their hosts, where they were accommodated.<sup>7</sup>

As the already mentioned Dominic, also Nicolas and Ladislaus probably went to seek education in a more important town after completing their primary education directly at home with a private educator and teacher, like most of the noble sons at that time. Mentions of private teachers, even in the services of the lower nobility or bourgeoisie, are also noted in the sources. A teacher (*scolaris*), grandson of Helena's butler worked in the service of the Zagreb doctor, Master Nicolas and his wife Helen, in the year 1454.<sup>8</sup> In 1495, an agreement was concluded in Košice by Mrs. Elizabeth, the wife of Michael Ötvös, with a certain teacher (*Schulmaister*), who was to take care of her children.<sup>9</sup> We learn about the teaching of a noble son in the home environment, for example, also from the will of George of Drienčany (Gömör County) in 1521. In his will, George wanted his son to receive primary education, including the basics of writing, directly at home, under the supervision of an erudite teacher. After acquiring primary knowledge, his son Farkas was to study in Košice, where he was to receive education in the German language as well as in other scientific disciplines.<sup>10</sup> Farkas was undoubtedly to study at the local Latin school, at that time also called as a gymnasium in the sources. John Bubek of Plešivec, another Gömör nobleman, also named it so, as he sent his son to study there in 1514.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, other relatives were raised under the supervision of a private teacher in one nobility household. This information is mentioned, for example, in a letter from Magdalena Székely of Ormosd, the wife of Thomas of Seč (*Széchy*),

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7 MNL OL DL 49999; NAGY, Imre – VÉGHÉLY, Dezső – NAGY, Gyula (eds.). *Zala vármegye története. Oklevéltár II. 1364–1498* [History of the Zala County. Collection of documents II. 1364–1498]. Budapest: Zala vármegye közönsége, 1890, p. 550, no. 278.

8 BÉKEFI, Remig. *A népoktatás története Magyarországon 1540-ig*. [History of education in the Kingdom of Hungary until 1540]. Budapest: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1906, p. 292, no. CVI.

9 Ibid, p. 347, no. CLXXV.

10 MNL OL DL 72196. George was the son of the Croatian-Dalmatian Ban Emeric of Drienčany and Ursula Szapolyai, who was a sister of Stephen and Emeric Szapolyai. SROKA, Stanislaw A. A Szapolyi család genealógiája [Genealogy of the Szapolyai family]. In *Turul*, 2005, 3.–4. füzet, p. 97. ISSN 1216-7258.

11 "... in gymnasio vestro Cassoviensi". BÉKEFI, ref. 8, p. 377, no. CCXX.

the count of Vas County, which she sent from her residence Felsőlendva (Vas County) to her mother Mrs. Ursula at the beginning of April 1524. Among other things, she informed her about her brother Michael, who was living with her. She wrote that he was doing well and that she had made sure that her brother, as well as Stephen of Seč, had been educated under the supervision of a teacher (*per eruditorem*). Stephen was the son of Thomas of Seč from his first marriage and he was undoubtedly already an adult in the mentioned year. This is also evident by the title *dominus* in front of his name, which Magdalena used to name him. Stephen was with his father in Buda at the time. However, Magdalena also wrote about their plans when Thomas and Stephen would return home. She was troubled by bad manners and the furious nature of Michael. Therefore, she decided to send him accompanied by Ladislaus, the abbot of the Cistercian monastery in St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd, Vas County) to Graz (today in Austria). There he was to learn to behave in a milder way and at the same time to learn German language. As Magdalena noted, Michael was of the same nature as her deceased father Nicholas.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear from the above examples that after the noble boys received primary education at home from a private teacher or from several teachers, they themselves or especially their parents had the ambition to expand the acquired knowledge with more professional knowledge. Therefore, these students left their home (often with their teacher or a servant of their parents) and began to study behind the walls of more significant town schools, even universities. A unique source has been preserved about the trip of such a student to the university, which at that time was the one that lasted the longest in the Kingdom of Hungary, the Istropolitan University. He was accompanied by his teacher and it documents all the expenses the student had during his trip to Bratislava and after arriving in the city. It is a statement of expenses written for his lord by the teacher of the mentioned student.<sup>13</sup> The student was John Lőkös of Kálló (in

12 BÉKEFI, ref. 8, p. 196, p. 412, no. CCLXIV. Magdalen's husband Thomas came from the ancient Baloghs family, originally from the family line from Seč (today Rimavská Seč), from which a new family line was separated at the end of the 14th century, having its residence in Felsőlendva Castle. In 1391, Thomas' ancestors received patronage from the king over the Cistercian monastery in St. Gotthard. It belonged to them throughout the entire Middle Ages. VALTER, Ilona – LŐVEI, Pál – FARAGÓ, János. Szentgotthárd, középkori ciszterci monostor [Szentgotthárd, medieval Cistercian monastery]. In LŐVEI, Pál (szerk.). *Lapidarium hungaricum 6. Vas megye II. Vas megye műemlékeinek töredékei 2. Magyarszecsőd – Zsennye*. Budapest: A Kulturális örökségvédelmi hivatal az Országos tudományos kutatási alapprogramok támogatásával, 2002, p. 224. ISBN 963714353x. Therefore, Magdalen entrusted her brother to the abbot of this monastery. And it is this monastery that apparently provided a private teacher who educated Michael and Stephen at home.

13 MNL OL DL 48206.



Szabolcs County, now Nagykálló), the son of John Lőkös, who appears in the sources as a deputy of a judge royal (in 1447 and 1477). In 1467, John Lőkös Jr. became one of the first students of the newly established university. On their way to Bratislava, he, his teacher and servant Thomas stopped in Buda, in order to buy writing utensils for John's study (three pounds of paper, two ounces of oak gall, resin and vitriol for making an ink). After arriving in Bratislava, they had expenses with accommodation in a hospice and subsequently, they had to provide appropriate clothing that corresponded with the status of a student at the university. In addition to everyday clothes, they also had to buy ceremonial clothes (a long tunic lined with hare or marten fur) as well as winter clothes (a fox fur coat).<sup>14</sup>

We most often learn about nobility students of medieval universities indirectly, usually from mentions in university registries. They name several cases of Hungarian noblemen studying out of the kingdom, most often from the lower rather than the higher nobility.<sup>15</sup> In order to get their university education, they travelled especially to Vienna, Cracow and Prague, from the second half of the 14th century.<sup>16</sup> Among the first students at universities, coming from the ranks of the higher nobility, we note e.g. the son of the Voivode of Transylvania

14 MNL OL DL 48206. HLAVAČKOVÁ, Miriam. *Kapitula pri Dóme sv. Martina. Intelektuálne centrum Bratislavy v 15. storočí* [Chapter at the Cathedral of St. Martin. The intellectual centre of Bratislava in the 15th century]. Bratislava: Pro Historia, o. z., 2008, p. 127–128. ISBN 978-80-970060-2-0

15 The social origin of students can be traced in the registries mainly according to the amount paid for the matriculation fee. Only members of the nobility, the higher clergy or the wealthier middle class could pay it at once. The title of the noblemen is mentioned only in few cases in the registers. In the registry of the University of Vienna we may find titles such as *dominus* (e.g. Peter Perbing from Svätý Jur), Coloman from Trnava, Ulrik from Veľká Lúča, Erhard Mostl from Pezinok), *nobilis* (Christopher Feyrtag from Trnava, Urban from Veľká Lúča), *comes* (Martin from Svätý Jur), *generosus dominus comes* (Nicholas of Svätý Jur), *baronis regni Hungariae* (Matthias of Eliášovce), or an ecclesiastical rank (e.g. chaplain, canon). More in TIHÁNYIOVÁ, Monika. *Stredoveké školy v Bratislavskej župe a ich študenti na univerzitách vo Viedni, v Krakove a v Prahe* [Medieval schools in the County of Bratislava and their students at universities in Vienna, Cracow and Prague]. In *Verbum historiae*, [online], 2016, no. 2, p. 28–29. Available on: <http://verbum-historiae.blogspot.com/>. [cit. 2021-10-10].

16 In the Kingdom of Hungary itself, the first steps to establish a university were taken only during the reign of King Louis the Great (Pécs). However, neither this king nor the following one the King Sigismund of Luxembourg, who founded the University of Buda at the beginning of the 15th century, was not very successful and the operation of these schools did not continue. The establishment of the Istropolitana University in present-day Bratislava by King Matthias Corvinus had a similar fate (1465, 1467). More in ŠTULRAJTEROVÁ, Jana. *Vysoké školstvo v Uhorsku v 14. a 15. storočí a založenie Academie Istropolitany* [Higher education in the Kingdom of Hungary in the 14th and 15th centuries and the establishment of the Istropolitana Academy]. In *Paedagogica – Proceedings of the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University*, 2008, vol. 20, p. 49–58. ISBN 978-80-223-2536-3.

Stibor of Stiboricz (1395–1401, 1409–1414), at the University of Prague, or John of Kanizsa, the later Archbishop of Esztergom in the years 1387–1418, at the University of Padua. Later we find members of the Hungarian nobility enrolled at the University of Vienna, where studied e.g. Peter of Pavlovce, son of the palatine Matthias of Pavlovce (1435–1436) as well as his uncle, later Archbishop of Esztergom, George of Pavlovce (1423–1439). Dionysius of Seč, Archbishop of Esztergom from 1440 to 1465, enrolled at the University of Vienna in 1424 with his brother. After graduating in Vienna, he went to study in Bologna, where, in 1434, he received his doctorate in canon law.<sup>17</sup> After studying at the town school in Győr, the aforementioned Nicholas of Rum probably enrolled at the university as well. We can identify him with a student of the same name and origin, enrolled at the University of Vienna in 1456 (*Nicolaus de Rwm*).<sup>18</sup> After studying in Košice, Emeric Bubek, the son of the aforementioned John Bubek of Plešivec, also went to the university and later became Székesfehérvár chapter provost. It was recorded in Cracow, 1518 (*Emericus magnifici Joannis de Bebeg*).<sup>19</sup>

As we can see, references to the education of the nobility, either in schools or at home, refer primarily to the sons of nobles. We do not know much about the education of daughters in the Middle Ages.<sup>20</sup> After all, it was not even required at

- 17 DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Daniela. *Rytier a jeho král. Stibor zo Stiboric a Žigmund Luxemburský* [Knight and his King: Stibor of Stiboricz and Sigismund of Luxembourg]. Budmerice: Vydavateľstvo Rak, 2017, p. 357, 375–6. ISBN 978-80-85501-67-4; DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Daniela. Ostrihomský arcibiskup Dionýz zo Seče, významný prelát, politik a diplomat 15. storočia [Archbishop of Esztergom Dionysius of Seč, important prelate, politician and diplomat of the 15th century]. In *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 2020, vol. 24, no. 2, p. 296–297.
- 18 TÜSKÉS, Anna. *Magyarországi diákok a bécsi egyetemen 1365 és 1526 között* [Students from the Kingdom of Hungary at the University of Vienna 1365–1526]. Budapest: Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Levéltára, 2008, p. 202, no. 3936. ISBN 978-963-463-974-9.
- 19 GASIOROWSKI, Anton – JUREK, Tomasz – SKIERSKA, Izabela (eds.). *Metryka czyli album Uniwersytetu Krakowskiego z lat 1509 – 1551. Vol 1.* [Registry or album record of the University of Cracow from 1509 – 1511. Vol 1.]. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010, p. 93. ISBN 978-83-7543-143-8.
- 20 However, there is no doubt that women perceived the need for education and knowledge, which is also indirectly pointed out by the preserved sources in which the noblewomen supported the financial or material education of their male relatives. For example, in 1371, a widow bequeathed part of her income to an unnamed student of the Chapter School in Győr. CDH IX/IV, 358; NAGY, Imre et al. (eds.). *Hazai okmánytár: Codex diplomaticus patrius II*. Győr, 1865, p. 323, 326. In 1434, Agnes, the daughter of Lucas, bequeathed in her will all her movable and immovable property to her brother, the scholastic Matthias (*Mathei scholastici*). BÉKEFI, ref. 8, p. 253, no. LXXIII. However, in the Middle Ages, it was more rare than usual for noblewomen in the Kingdom of Hungary to be able to read or even write. This situation changed only gradually during the 16th to 17th centuries. Even in this period, we still find many illiterates among the noblewomen, even those from influential families. This is



the time. The female members of the nobility families who chose or were obliged to live in the convents (often after they became widows) knew to read and write. However, it is important to point out that in the Middle Ages, there were far fewer female than men monasteries (even compared with women convents in the rest of Europe) and, moreover, not every one of these convents had a school.<sup>21</sup> The education of nuns and the management of their private correspondence already in the 14th century is evident in e.g. a letter from 1365, written by a nun of the Dominican convent of St. Katherine in Veszprém (in today's Hungary), Helen, daughter of Master Stephen (Jutasi). In her letter, she asked her relative, perhaps her brother Master Ladislaus, a judge royal (*iudex curiae*) at the court of the widow of Ban Peter of Remete (of the Himfy family), for help in the matter of the devastation of family property.<sup>22</sup>

For noblewomen who got married, the main mission of their lives became the continuation of their husband's lineage, the care of the household; in the event of the husband's departure for duties, the supervision of the staff who managed their property. These women are noted in credible sources only as daughters, wives,

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possible to notice, for example, by their hard-written closing greetings or signatures in their letters, otherwise compiled mainly by their own scribes. LENGYELOVÁ, Tünde. *Sféry ženy v neskorom stredoveku a ranom novoveku* [The realms of women in the late Middle Ages and early modern times]. In DARULOVÁ, Jolana – KOŠTIALOVÁ, Katarína (eds.). *Realms of women. Sociology, ethnology, history*. Banská Bystrica: Fakulta humanitných vied Univerzity Mateja Bela; Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR v Prahe, 2004, p. 373–374. ISBN80-8055-999-6.

- 21 During the Middle Ages, Benedictines, Cistercians, Premonstratensian, Dominicans and Clarisses were the main monastic orders in the Kingdom of Hungary. More in VALACHOVÁ, Denisa. *Ženské kláštory v stredovekom Uhorsku s dôrazom na Slovensko* [Women's monasteries in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary with an emphasis on Slovakia]. In RADZIMIŃSKI, Andrzej (red.). *Sanctimoniales. Zakony żeńskie w Polsce i Europie Środkowej (do przełomu XVIII i XIX wieku)*. Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego; Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2010, p. 141–161. ISBN 978-83-7096-763-5, 978-83-7096-2519-8. It is in connection with the Clarisses in Bratislava that we learn that they were invited by the Bishop of Oradea to establish a convent in his diocese and take care of the education of the girls in 1342. Based on this, it is possible to assume the pedagogical activity of the Clarisses in Bratislava as well. LYSÁ, Žofia. Bratislava. In ŠTEFÁNIK, Martin – LUKAČKA, Ján and the coll. *Lexikon stredovekých miest na Slovensku* [Lexicon of medieval towns in Slovakia]. Bratislava: VEDA, 2010, p. 126. ISBN 9788089396115. Even if the school did not exist near the convent, there is no doubt that minimally reading was one of the main daily activities of nuns, in addition to prayer, embroidery or work in the kitchen. More on education in women's monasteries in e.g. BÉKEFI, ref. 8, p. 198–204. MISÁK, Marianna. *“Minden oskolába járó leány gyermektől ...” Református nőnevelés a 16 – 19. századi Felső – Magyarországon*. [“Every girl going to school since childhood ...” Education of women of the Reformed faith in the upper part of the Kingdom of Hungary in the 16th – 19th century]. Sárospatak: Hernád kiadó, 2014, p. 19–42.

- 22 *Árpád-kori*, ref. 3, p. 249, no. 151.

mothers or widows, who, in any matter, were represented by their husband, son, brother or brother-in-law, or by a selected familiar. However, as we have the opportunity to observe from the preserved letters (at the latest from the last third of the 14th century) among the noblewomen, we may find several those who mastered the script and led written communication, not only in public affairs but also in private ones. Thanks to these letters, we learn about other aspects of their lives.<sup>23</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Hungarian noblewomen received their education and knowledge of writing as children when they and their brothers or other male relatives were taught privately. This took place under the supervision of a teacher in their parents' house.<sup>24</sup> Young noblewomen could also acquire primary education at the court of a more influential nobleman or a relative of their parents, where they were sent for upbringing. We learn about such an upbringing at the end of the Middle Ages from a rare letter written by Perpetua Batthyány, the wife of Michael Dersffy (*Dersfi*). The letter was sent to her daughter Katherine at the

23 A nice example of this is e.g. a correspondence of the wife of Ladislaus of Kanizsa, Mrs. Anna, originally from the Drágfi (*Drágffy*) family. From the almost twenty preserved letters written (by her / her scribe) and the other four addressed to her, we may see her need to communicate in writing. In addition, by reading her letters, we have the opportunity to witness the serious changes in her life that occurred when she was widowed in the summer of 1525. As the wife of the Vas County count, she waited patiently for him at the family residence in Sárvár and carried out all his orders (e.g. a demanding procurement and subsequent sending of several barrels of sea octopuses and cuttlefish to her husband so that he could eat properly during the pre-Easter fast). However, as a widow, she was in charge of the administration of large estates, including several border castle estates. This task was all the more challenging because it was at the time of the inevitable invasion of the Ottomans into the Kingdom of Hungary. From the first half of 1526, several of Anna's letters addressed to the castellans of her castles Velika or Velički grad (Velike in Hungarian, north of the town Požega, Požega County) and Steničnjak (Sztenicsnyák in Hungarian, southeast of the town Karlovac, Zagreb County) have been preserved. Anna sent them from several of her other castles (Medjurič, Vasmegyerice in Hungarian, Kőrös County, Egervár and Kaniža in Zala County, Leka, Lockenhaus in German, Vas County), that she visited in order to inspect them. As we can see, after the death of her husband Anna left her home and began her journey around the kingdom. We learn from her letters that she struggled with supplying her castles, not only with food, but also with the army and weapons (with weapons "bradatica" – "bearded" light guns and gunpowder). MNL OL DL 25695, 25697, 25699, 104459, 104461, 104462, 104466, 104467, 104470, 104475. More about the correspondence of Anna and Ladislaus, as well as of Ladislaus with his mother Clara from Rozhanovce in TIHÁNYIOVÁ, Monika. *Príbuzenské vzťahy a komunikácia medzi šľachtickými rodmi v stredoveku* [Relationships and communication between noble families in the Middle Ages]. In HLAVÁČKOVÁ, Miriam (ed.). *Od symbolu k slovu. Podoby stredovekej komunikácie*. Bratislava: Veda 2016, p. 116–122. ISBN 9788022415378.

24 It was the parents who were probably aware of their female members need to express themselves in writing, which is possible to see by the preserved correspondence of female members of selected families, which we have the opportunity to observe in several generations.

beginning of June 1526.<sup>25</sup> We learn from the letter that Perpetua's three daughters lived at the courts of influential and wealthy nobles and magnates, including the court of her brother Ferenc Batthyány. It is not clear what specifically they should have learned there. However, we can assume that, in addition to a good upbringing, it was primarily a matter of finding the best possible husbands for her daughters by letting them stay at an important court.

In the case of correspondence, where the participants were members of the higher nobility and magnate families, it is clear that the letters were written by scribes working in their service. However, we can assume that the letters containing personal and intimate information were most likely written by the noblemen and noblewomen themselves. It was much easier to compile a private letter than a document with universal validity. Unlike documents, the letters had a simpler form, including content that was mostly private in nature and intended to be read only by the selected addressee. The letter consisted of a greeting, the text itself – capturing the most current issues to be reported to the loved one or an acquaintance, and then the sender's signature, possibly stating the current rank. In the case of women, it stated their status or relationship to the addressee (wife, sister, friend or widow). If the sender of the letter is a man and the addressee is a woman, we will find out her name only in rare cases. Usually, we do not learn it even from the "address" written on the letterhead after being folded. Again, only the family relationship is mentioned (mother, wife, widow, sister-in-law...). Thus, in order to effectively do the research of this type of diplomatic source, it is important to know the genealogy of the family to which the researched letters are related.

To get to know who drafted a given letter (a nobleman/a noblewoman or a hired scribe) is possible from the text itself. For example, at the end of the already mentioned letter from 1451 we learn that Nicolas of Rum wrote it himself. In addition, two more lines of different manuscript appeared below his text, written by Nicholas' brother Ladislaus. Although he only confirmed what Nicolas had already written and wrote nothing more because his eyes ached.<sup>26</sup> If it is not possible to know directly from the letter who wrote it, it could be evident from the manuscript itself. If the font is difficult to read, confusing, without spaces nor capital letters, lacking paragraphs and often with visible errors and strikethrough words – it is possible that it has been written by the sender himself/herself. If a letter is neat, the emendation is thorough – it is likely that the letter has been written by an experienced nobleman/noblewoman, or by a trained scribe with certain clerical habits who works for them.

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25 MNL OL DL 104464.

26 MNL OL DL 49999.

Usually, the letters were folded and sealed after writing, most often with a ring seal, made by a signet ring (*anulus sigillaris*), as we have the opportunity to observe in e.g. a letter from Mrs. Hedwig of Marcali, the widow of Peter of Svätý Jur and Pezinok (from 1438).<sup>27</sup> Hedwig's letter confirms that the noblewomen also had these rings at their disposal, although their imprints were rarely preserved.<sup>28</sup>

After the letters were sealed, they were handed over to the messenger, most frequently from the acquaintance of the respective noble families. In the case of private letters, most of the information was provided in written form.<sup>29</sup> The messenger provided, at most, oral information, thus supplementing the information written in the letter. The messengers were also used in the case of important information that should have been delivered as soon as possible. For example, in 1508, George of Kanizsa sent with his wife Clara not only a letter for his son to Buda's royal court but also a familiar, whose task was to inform them about their son's health as soon as possible.<sup>30</sup> The letters often included information about items a sender sent via the messenger to the addressee. Usually, it was money, clothes, food, horses or wagons with horses.

The state of preservation of medieval letters is more modest in comparison with credible documents, which is related to the temporary importance of these sources' content. The letters were often torn immediately after reading, especially if they contained important military-political information, but also because of their temporary relevance. Nevertheless, many private letters from the environment of the Hungarian nobility have been preserved, thus providing us with rare information from the world of their everyday life. This also includes the language in which the writers mainly communicated. We may find letters from noblewomen that were written in German in addition to the Latin language already in the first half of the 15th century.<sup>31</sup> Also, we encounter letters written in

27 MNL OL DL 44215.

28 Hedwig's letter with the preserved coat of arms ring seal also completes our picture of the coat of arms of the counts of Svätý Jur and Pezinok. KÖRMENDI, Tamás. A Hontpázmány nemzetség címerváltozatai a középkorban [The Variations of the Coat of Arms of the Hont-Pázmány Kindred in the Middle Ages]. In *Levéltári Közlemények*, 2011, 82, 2, p. 59–60. ISSN 0024-1512.

29 If the messenger carried a message of important political-military significance, it was mediated mainly orally for security reasons, while the letter he carried to the addressee only proved his identity and credibility. DVOŘÁKOVÁ, ref. 5, p. 125.

30 The parents were worried about their son, as they heard that several people had recently died of plague at the royal court. MNL OL DL 25497. For example, in 1522, Dorota of Kanizsa wrote from her castle Valpovo (Baranya County, today in Croatia) to her brother Ladislaus of Kanizsa that, as promised, she would send someone to him, who would acquaint him with the necessary matters that had to be dealt with. MNL OL DL 25653.

31 Such letters include e.g. letters from the aforementioned Hedwig, daughter of the Voivode of Transylvania Nicholas of Marcali, who married into the noble family of the counts of Svätý

Hungarian, even from female members of Hungarian families from the end of the 15th century, and especially in the first third of the 16th century. Slovak language, or in other words Slovakized Czech, could be found in the correspondence of the Hungarian nobility since the mid-20s of the 15th century. However, these are letters exclusively from male members of noble families. Some of the letters in this language were written by Nicholas of Perín, several members of the Counts of Svätý Jur and Pezinok, Stibor of Stiboricz Jr., Pongracz of Svätý Mikuláš or Peter Komorovsky.<sup>32</sup> However, this fact allows us to assume that the wives of these nobles were able to write and read in Slovak as well.<sup>33</sup>

While in the 13th century, the senders of the preserved letters were mainly men, from the 14th and especially in the 15th century, when writing letters gradually became a daily routine of the nobility, we began to encounter letters sent by Hungarian noblewomen. One of the many preserved letters written by a Hungarian noblewoman (or by a scribe in her name) is the letter of the count James' wife from 1326. Count James (1323–1330) of the Szabolcs County was the son of the deceased palatine Dózsa Debreceni (1322).<sup>34</sup> We do not know her name; she informed her addressee only about the name and rank of her deceased father-in-law and husband. Given that the addressee is Master Ivan, the son of the count Aegidius of the Kálló family, who is addressed as her close relative (*suo proximo plurimum honorando*), it is possible that she came from this family. She wrote him about the theft of two oxen, one coat and two axes that were to

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Jur and Pezinok. Her letters are from July 1434 to May 1439. She exclusively wrote about the situation with her property, which she managed from Pezinok as a widow and on behalf of her underage sons. In all cases, the correspondence is exclusively with the city of Bratislava. In July 1434, e.g. she requested her servant Oswald's release. The city had imprisoned him after being caught in the city with a gun. Hedwig explained how Oswald had got this gun, originally belonging to the Hussites. In a letter dated October 1436, she mentioned her chaplain Simon Czaiger (*Czayger*) and the book she had sent to the city through him. There is another interesting letter from the end of May 1439, when she asked the city of Bratislava to inform her about the king and the dignitaries of his court, or in another words about his followers. MNL OL DL 43997, 44215, 44248, MNL OL DF 241672, 241705.

32 CHALOUPECKÝ, Václav. *Medieval letters from Slovakia*. Bratislava: Učená spoločnosť Šafaříkova; Praha: Melantrich, 1937, p. XI–XII.

33 One of the first documents on the mastery of Slovakized Czech, even in written form by a female member of the bourgeoisie, is a letter written in Czech by John Šilhavy from Strážnice (Bohemia), which was addressed to a certain Mrs. Katherine from Bratislava. In the letter, John explained what the reason was for not marrying her (*"skrzevá zlé lidi"*/"through bad people") and why he had to marry other woman (*"sem já se oženiti mosel, nechtěl-li sem v vězení zhnít"*/"I had to get married as I did not want to rot in prison"). Ibid., p. 17, no. 14. Another letter testifies Katherine's knowledge of writing, which was probably a response to the one she wrote herself. It was from John's wife Anna who wrote to her in August 1442 and apparently reacted to Katherine's previous criticism. Ibid., p. 18, no. 15.

34 *Árpád-kori*, ref. 3, p. 238, no. 132; CDH VIII/3, p. 171.

be stolen by Ivan's familiar from her vassals in the village of Tursamson (Bihar County). The letter was written in Debrecen, undoubtedly at the time when her husband was performing his duties in the south of the kingdom and when all the troubles of managing the administration of property, including the lives of their vassals, were in the hands of his wife.

By examining medieval correspondence, we may directly see the life of Hungarian noblewomen at the time when they did not have a loved one, husband, son, mother, or other relative or friend, nearby. From the lines they wrote or were addressed to them, we may learn a lot about their daily troubles, resulting mainly from the situation that they were without their loved one. This is also confirmed by other letters from the last third of the 14th century, that have been preserved from the environment of the noble Himfy family.<sup>35</sup> Another letter may be dated somewhere between 1375 and 1380 and it is from the widow of the Ban Peter. She wrote to her servants about the arrangement of relations on her unnamed property, especially the injustice and damages caused to her vassals because the Hungarian palatine would soon pass through this territory. She also ordered them to be there at the time of his arrival.<sup>36</sup> The widow of the Ban Peter was also in written contact with her brother-in-law, the former Ban Benedict, as might be evident by the introductory words of his letter, probably from September 1380.<sup>37</sup> Benedict described his position on the impending mutual division of the property, which, according to him, should not take place until his son and brother return. He also informed his sister-in-law about the six horses he would like to give her, but he had given them to his son to help him serve in the army, and the

35 The Himfy family owned property mainly in the south of the kingdom, in the Temes County. They worked here as counts and vice-counts. Benedict and his brother Peter were very well-known in the 14th century. They were the leaders of the Bulgarian Banate in the years 1366–1369, after its annexation to the Kingdom of Hungary by King Louis the Great (1365). During the Middle Ages, this family often intervened in the history of today's Slovakia (e.g. the bishop of Nitra Thomas Himfy in the years 1459–1481 or Turnian castellan Emeric, who in the years 1498–1502 administered Turňa Castle in the service of the Szapolyai family). ENGEL, Pál. Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301–1457. [Secular Archontology of Hungary, 1301–1457]. In *Arcanum DVD Könyvtár IV. Családtörténet, heraldika, honismeret*. Budapest: Arcanum, 2003, entry Bolgár Ban; C. TÓTH, ref. 1, p. 44; TIHÁNYIOVÁ, Monika. Turňa. In DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Daniela and coll. *Stredoveké hrady na Slovensku. Život, kultúra, spoločnosť*. Bratislava: Veda 2017, p. 412–413. ISBN 978-80-224-1608-5.

36 MNL OL DL 56634.

37 MNL OL DL 47901. In order to determine exact date of the letter, we rely on his rank as count of Bratislava, which he stated in the letter. Benedict was twice at the head of Bratislava County during his life, first in the years 1362–1365, then in the years 1379–1380. ENGEL, ref. 32, entry V. Várnagyok és várbitokosok (Castellans and castle owners), Pozsony. As the letter was addressed to his sister-in-law as a widow that she became in 1375, it is clear that he wrote the letter in 1379 or 1380.



son still did not return them. He also had an interesting request for his relative. He asked her not to talk about her affairs while she would be staying at the royal court. Who knows what he meant by that. At the end of the letter, he praised God for helping him to finish all his duties in the service of the king. Finally, he signed off with the assurance of his and his wife's good health.<sup>38</sup> Another letter from which we learn about internal affairs in the life of the Himfy family was written in 1386, and it is from Benedict and Peter's cousin, Lawrence Himfy. He wrote to Benedict's widow. His words in the letter confirmed that after the death of both Bans, their closest male relatives took over the care of their widows. It is also clear from this letter that there was regular written contact between these two people. Lawrence responded to the widow's request to leave the convent, where she had gone after the death of her husband Benedict, and she wanted to return to her property. However, Lawrence warned her not to do so. He informed her about the unfavourable situation that occurred on her estate after the fighting of two different armies (*exercitus unus contra alium*). Her possessions were devastated, including a house with a curia (*quod vestri domi cum curia totaliter sunt desolati*). He also informed her of the condition of her local vassals, of her horses, and of the fact that he had nine barrels of her wine. Then he wrote that he would visit her after Christmas and bring her enough money.<sup>39</sup> Nicholas, the brother of the deceased Benedict and Peter, also had written to his sister-in-law about the devastated property before Lawrence did.<sup>40</sup> However, we do not learn from this letter, as well as from the previous ones, the name of the noblewoman. Nicholas addressed the letter only to his sister-in-law (*sue glosse*), the widow of the deceased Ban Benedict, who is addressed very respectfully, Your Nobility (*vestra dominatio*). He asked her whether she was planning to involve him in resolving the situation with her assets on the 'Alföld' (*ad Alföld*) and at the same time explained her what his next steps would be in this matter.<sup>41</sup>

The very first letter, which was not only sent by a woman but also addressed to a woman, might be found again within the Himfy family in 1440. We have managed to find ten letters so far from the Middle Ages, in which the sender and the addressee were a female members of the nobility. The first one is written on August 7, 1440, by the widow of Nicholas Himfy, Mrs. Julia (*Egregia domina Juliana consors relictæ condam Nicolai Hymfy*) to her mother. The name of Julia's mother is not mentioned, but from the information on the letterhead we learn

38 Ibid.

39 MNL OL DL 47943. More on the letter dating in ENGEL, Pál. A török-magyar háborúk első évei 1389–1392 [The first years of the Ottoman-Hungarian Wars, 1389–1392]. In *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 111 évfolyam, 3. szám, 1998, p. 568.

40 MNL OL DL 47869. The letter is dated between 1380 and 1385.

41 Ibid.

that she was the widow of Lawrence of Tar (*magnifice domine relictę condam Laurentii de Thaar matruę sue karissime*). The letter is very interesting thanks to the involved women, as Julia's mother does not appear in other sources at all and the indicated kinship of Julia with the noble family from Tar (originally from the ancient Ratold family) is not even noted in the professional literature. We do not even know much about Nicolas, Julia's deceased husband. He was probably the son of Basilius Himfy from his first marriage to Mrs. Katherine, mentioned in the document from Queen Elizabeth in 1439. However, this is the only reference we have been able to find about him.<sup>42</sup>

The only well-known person in these relationships is Julia's father and deceased husband of Julia's mother, Lawrence of Tar. He was the king's cup-bearer in the years 1404–1406, queen's cup-bearer in 1406–1409 and the steward in the years 1407–1413. Although a great number of professional works have been written about him, thanks to his adventurous life, during which he experienced e.g. pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela or to the tomb of St. Patrick, none of the works mention the specific name of his wife. In the genealogy of the family from Tar, Pál Engel mentioned Lawrence's wife without a first name, who was originally from Wallsee. However, he did not write the source from which he drew this information and subsequently, we do not encounter this mention in any other professional work devoted to Lawrence.<sup>43</sup> The already mentioned Lawrence's travel experiences as well as his merits at the royal court certainly did not exclude his marriage with a noblewoman of non-Hungarian origin; rather the opposite might be true. Engel's remark probably points to a noble family from Valsa or Walsee or Waldsee, originally from Swabia, whose members were in the service of the Austrian prince Albrecht, who later became the Hungarian king.<sup>44</sup> An indirect proof of Julia's mother origin could also be the name of Julia's brother Rupert, who we know not only from Julia's letter but also from other sources.<sup>45</sup>

42 MNL OL DL 44275; ENGEL, Pál. Középkori magyar genealógia [Medieval Hungarian genealogy]. In *Arcanum DVD Könyvtár IV. Családtörténet, heraldika, honismeret*. Budapest: Arcanum, 2003, entry Him rokonsága 2. tábla: Himfi. The decisive factor in the identification of Nicolas is the information that he was gone in 1440, as at that time several people named Nicholas from the Himfy family appeared, though they could be documented in the sources after 1440.

43 Ibid, entry Rátót nem. 4. tábla: Tari. We did not encounter the information that Lawrence had a daughter Julia in the Engel's work nor in the other works. More on Lawrence in e.g. DVOŘÁKOVÁ, ref. 17, p. 82–83, 163, 379, 403–404; CSUKOVITS, Enikő. A lovagi zárandoklat [Pilgrimage of knights]. In *Történelmi szemle*, 2001, 43. évf., 1-2 sz., p. 35–37.

44 FEST, Aladár. Fiume XV században [Fiume in the 15th century]. In *Századok*, 1912, p. 176–177.

45 He is mentioned as the son of Lawrence in e.g. MNL OL DL 15684.

But let's concentrate on Julia's words that she wrote to her mother. Right at the beginning, she informed her that all their property was destroyed by the Ottomans (*per turcos*), thus, they were suffering from poverty (*ad maximam egestatem*). Therefore, she pleaded her mother to contribute some alms, as she was well off, and they needed to bury some poor people. She asked her to talk about that with her son Rupert. At the same time, she asked her to send a better dress for her daughter, or better to say one part needed for this dress – a sleeve made of batiste or camuca (*unam manicam de busso vel camuca*).<sup>46</sup> The place Julia sent her letter from (*Scripta de Gew*) is translated as Győr in the Győr County, in the Hungarian abridgment of the document.<sup>47</sup> Julia noted that she was writing from her mother's property. However, we have not been able to find any connection of the lords of Tar or Walsee with this city in the literature and sources, so it is more likely that it was a different location.

While Julia's letter was written in distress and fear, urging her mother to help her, the following letter, written in peace a few years later, by Christina, Ladislaus Czech's wife, to her mother was full of love and respect for her. In the beginning, Christina assured her of her health, as she always asked to be informed (undoubtedly through letters), just as her mother liked to inform her about her own health as well as that of her husband's. However, Christina would like to inform her that she and her husband were going to complete the necessary legal matters (*finito iudicos*) and due to this occasion, they would like to visit her as well. Before leaving their home, Christina promised to send her servant (*certam hominum nostrum*) to inform her mother of their departure. Christina wrote this letter in Levice without further dating (she tried, but she crossed it out) in 1467. The address on the letterhead allows us to learn more about the ancestry of the mother and daughter. Christina addressed her letter to her mother, who had the same name – Christina. She was the widow of Ladislaus of Putnok (Gömör County).<sup>48</sup>

Also, without further dating, but with the mention of the year 1471, Mrs. Potenciana, the widow of John of Csaholy, wrote from Csaholy (in Szatmár County, today's Nyírcsaholy), to Mrs. Julia, the wife of John Lőkös from Kálló (Szabolcs County, today's Nagykálló) and the mother of John, the aforementioned student of the University of Istropolitana. Unfortunately, we do not learn very much about the relationship between these two women from the letter. Potenciana addressed Mrs. Julia as an honourable woman (*domina nobis honoranda*) and she asked her for a relatively expensive thing, namely a carriage. She needed it for her trip to

46 MNL OL DL 44297.

47 Available on the Internet <https://archives.hungaricana.hu/en/charters/150367/?list=eyJxdWVyeSI6ICI0NDI5NyJ9> (cit. 2021-03-02).

48 MNL OL DL 90113.

Bátor (Szabolcs County, today's Nyírbátor) in order to deal with certain matters. At the end of the letter, Potenciana promised to return it upon arrival without damage.<sup>49</sup> It is not possible to learn from the letter about the original family affiliation of both women, which might clarify their relationship.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, the two following letters, written in 1472 by two different noblewomen, might help solve this. However, they are again addressed to the wife of John Lőkös of Kálló, who, as we can see, probably had regular personal correspondence not only with relatives but also with various acquaintances and friends. The first letter was written by Mrs. Barbara, the wife of George of Parlag (the count of the Szabolcs County and the king's steward in 1471–1484), to her godmother (*conpatrissa nostra*) on December 9, 1472.<sup>51</sup> We know, from the genealogy of the noble family from Parlag, that the daughter of Barbara and George – Helen – was married to John of Kálló,<sup>52</sup> who was, perhaps, the son of Julia, the already mentioned student John. Thanks to the letter, we were able to find out about the items that the Hungarian noblewomen used to borrow from each other. In this case, it was a handmade rosary (*legibulum*). Barbara wrote the letter from the house of Andrew Báthory (Mrs. Potenciana, from the previous letter, was probably also going there). She remembered the rosary she had given to the wife of John of Kálló for her maid. But in the letter, she was asking her to return it, and she did not like the fact that she did not want to give it back, as her servants informed her.<sup>53</sup> The second letter was written to the wife of John of Kálló by Mrs. Dorota, the wife of the aforementioned Andrew Báthory, on December 21, 1472.<sup>54</sup> Dorota wrote to the mentioned noblewoman as her friend, or in other words to her friend's wife, a fact that we may learn from the address on the letterhead (*amice nobis honorande*). It is an accompanying letter for Dorota's servant, who was sent from Bátor to John's wife, probably on the basis of a previous, certainly written

49 MNL OL DL 55954.

50 We managed to find out something else about Mrs. Julia. She had already been married once and that to Odoard (Odward) Manini who was of Italian origin and was the Count of Buda mining, Count of Máramaros and the administrator of the Salt Chamber in Máramaros. MNL OL DL 55652. DRASKÓCZY, István. A sókamárak igazgatása és tisztségviselői 1440–1457 [Administration of salt chambers and their administrators]. In *Turul*, 1. füzet, 2017, p. 4–5. ISSN 1216-7258.

51 MNL OL DL 45517.

52 ENGEL, ref. 39, entry Parlagi; MNL OL DL 19120.

53 MNL OL DL 45517.

54 MNL OL DL 55962. Andrew was the son of the judge royal Stephen of Bátor and he himself was a royal steward in 1458 and Master of the Horse in 1460. His brother was Stephen Báthory, Voivode of Transylvania. Dorota and Andrew's son Stephen was the palatine of Hungary in the years 1519–1523, 1524–1525, 1526–1530. ENGEL, ref. 39, entry Gútkeled nem 1. Rakamazi ág, 6. tábla: Bátor (ecsed); C. TÓTH, ref. 1, p. 82–83.

agreement. Reportedly, John's wife wanted to send Dorota a beer and a dry wine (*cerosia et menosia desiccata*).<sup>55</sup> The above mentioned three examples allow us to follow the communication of three noblewomen, who might have been distant relatives, but in any case they were friends and had not only written contact with each other, but probably also personal, as evidenced by the aforementioned visit of Barbara in Andrew's house.

At the beginning of 1479, nun Dorota of Gereben (in Slavonia, Körös County) wrote to her sister, Mrs. Sophia, the widow of Peter of Bikszád, from the Clarisse convent in Óbuda, which is consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Again, from the beginning of the letter, we see the regular exchange of letters between the two sisters. From the content of the preserved letter, we can even learn how a faithful member of the Church helped her close relative probably in the matter of the intended marriage. She advised her sister to choose the spouse (*sponsum*) she wanted and not the one she despised.<sup>56</sup> The sisters belonged to a noble family having their family estate at the Gereben Castle. Later on, after the above-mentioned letter, this castle estate gradually became the property of Balthasar Bathyány, who married the niece of both sisters – a daughter of their brother – Helen.<sup>57</sup> As well as before, the letter is the only evidence of Sophia's hitherto unknown marriage to Peter of Bikszád, but also of the existence of Dorota and her affiliation with the noble family from Gereben. J. Karácsonyi used the example of this letter to point out the possibility given to nuns of that time to write to their loved ones and even to lecture them and give them advice in the letters. In addition, this letter is also interesting from a heraldic and epigraphic point of view, as it has preserved the imprint of the Clarisse convent's seal in Óbuda. By comparing it with the later imprints of this convent's seals, after its move to Bratislava (from the 18th century), it was proved that it is the same seal that the nuns took with them during their escape from Buda because of the Ottomans invasion.<sup>58</sup>

Even other preserved letters, reflecting the communication between the two noblewomen, were also written from the convent. Two Hungarian letters, dated somewhere between 1512 and 1526, written by Barbara Tarczay (originally

55 MNL OL DL 55962. The proof of written communication between the two families is in a well-preserved letter from Dorota, the wife of Andrew of Bátor, to John Lőkös of Kálló, in which she pleaded for the release of an innocently captured vassal. MNL OL DL 55927.

56 MNL OL DL 45768.

57 ENGEL, ref. 39, entry Gárdonyi nem (grebeni Hermanfi ág).

58 KARÁCSONYI, János. Szt. Ferenc rendjének története Magyarországon 1711-ig. [A history of the order of St. Francis in Hungary until 1711]. Budapest 1924, p. 504; NÉMETHY, Lajos. Budapesti volt egyházi testületek pecsétjei. Két közlemény, tíz pecséttrajzzal [The seals of former ecclesiastical institutions in Budapest. Two parts, with ten illustrations of seals]. In *Turul*, 1887, p. 84.

from the Tótselymes family), were addressed to her mother Sarah, the widow of John Tarczay (*sara azonak az nehay nagysagos I tarcaý ýanosnenak en zeretp zylemnek adasek ez lewel*).<sup>59</sup> Sarah was a step-sister of Francis Dotzi from Veľká Lúča. Although, it is not clearly stated in the letter, we know from its composition (especially from the used words) as well as from another source that Barbara was also a nun and lived in a convent.<sup>60</sup> In the first preserved letter, Barbara pleaded her mother to pay her debt she had towards several merchants and one jeweller or a pearl jewellery manufacturer (*az gyþngy fýzþnek*). Their names are also written later in the letter. The first of these was Jacob Olasz, a well-known Jewish merchant of Spanish origin, from Buda. She also mentioned Michael Gazon, who had been appearing in the sources since 1507 as a merchant from Buda. Barbara asked her mother to pay the debt no later than the day of St. Paul, because otherwise, they would take her to court (*olaz ýakab gazon es agyþngy fýzþ engem býro eleýbe*). She also begged her mother not to leave her in such a disgrace, as it had been very well-known what kind of people Jewish merchants were. Later, she asked her mother about the date of her arrival. She also asked her to send a letter to the guardianus to seek forgiveness for her from Mr. Michael. This Mr. Michael was undoubtedly Barbara's brother-in-law, the husband of her sister Katherine, Michael Podmanitzky, a royal chamberlain (1517), later the commander-in-chief of the royal infantry.<sup>61</sup> Finally, she asked her mother for some wax, as the one she had sent before had already been used up, and wax, at her current whereabouts (she did not specify the place), was very expensive.<sup>62</sup>

In the second letter (again without dating), Barbara asked her mother to go to Bystrica (today's Považská Bystrica) to see Mr. Michael (certainly Podmanitzky). Since she asked her mother to demand as much money as she had previously given

59 *Középkori leveleink (1541-ig)* [Our medieval letters, until 1541]. Szerk. Attila Hegedűs, Lajos Papp. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1991, p. 42, no. 26, p. 46, no. 27. ISBN 963 18 3564 2.

60 In 1514, she reportedly asked two canons from the Buda Chapter to put in a good word for her admission to the Beguines convent of Buda. It is said that her mother entrusted her the entire inheritance in cash. The fact that she was successful is evident by a document from 1523, when she received permission from the nuncius to move from the Buda convent to another one. KARÁCSONYI, ref. 55, p. 547; DVOŘÁKOVÁ, Daniela. Kláštery a domy begín v stredovekom Uhorsku [Beguines convents and houses in medieval Hungary]. In RADZIMIŃSKI, Andrzej (red.). *Sanctimoniales. Zakony żeńskie w Polsce i Europie Środkowej (do przełomu XVIII i XIX wieku)*. Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego; Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2010, p. 166. ISBN 978-83-7096-763-5, 978-83-7096-2519-8.

61 Michael was the brother of John, the royal chamberlain and Stephen, the bishop of Nitra. ENGEL, ref. 39, entry Podmanicki.

62 *Középkori leveleink (1541-ig)*, ref. 56, p. 42, no. 26.



him, it is probable that Barbara encouraged her mother to solve the unauthorized deposit of the manor house in Bánovce (today's Bánovce nad Bebravou).<sup>63</sup> We know from another source that Michael deposited this manor house together with its accessories, to his mother-in-law Sarah, the widow of John Tarczay, in 1524. However, Michael's brother, Stephen Podmanitzky who was the bishop of Nitra, objected to this. The ownership rights to this manor house were supposed to belong to Francis Adam Podmanitzky.<sup>64</sup> Barbara realized that she did not want to beg her mother for money, but she encouraged her to believe that God and St. Michael would help her to get all five thousand gold coins back.<sup>65</sup>

In another preserved letter, we are again at the court of Ferenc Bathyány, when his wife Katherine (born Svetkovics) received a letter in March 1520.<sup>66</sup> The sender of the letter written in Latin was certain Katherine Korody (*Korodii*), who dated it *ex Gereben* and addressed it to her mistress (*domine mee semper generosissime*). Undoubtedly, it was the Gereben or Greben Castle in the Körös County (the southwest of the Kingdom of Hungary), which, as it has been already mentioned, belonged to Batthyány family in the last third of the 15th century. From the content of the letter, it seems as if the noblewoman obtained asylum at this castle thanks to Katherine Bathyány, probably after a failed marriage. At the beginning of the letter, the sender reminded her how she, Mrs. Katherine, once helped her to get married and she should probably – if the time is right – do it again. It had been said that her own master and husband had banished her out of their house, and therefore, thanks to Mrs. Katherine, she was living in her castle and using clothes and other necessary things that had been provided to her. Allegedly, she had asked for these things from her husband as well, but he refused to allow it or to compromise.<sup>67</sup> We do not know exactly who Katherine Korody, who signed this certainly handwritten letter (with a considerable number of errors), was. We do not even know her ruthless husband. Katherine's surname suggests that she might have been a member of the noble family from Korod (also Korog, Valkó County, today in Croatia, in Hungarian Kórógyi). However, this family died out in the male line in the second half of the 15th century.<sup>68</sup> We were not able to find any mention of her even in the scientific literature.

63 Ibid, p. 46, no. 27. The authors of the edition assume that the letter was written sometime between February 12, 1525 and August 29, 1526.

64 LUKINICH, Imre (ed.). *A Podmanini Podmaniczky-család oklevéltára II.* [Collection of documents of the family Podmaniczky of Podmanin II.]. Budapest: A magyar tudományos akadémia, 1939, p. LIV.

65 *Középkori leveleink (1541-ig)*, ref. 56, p. 46, no. 27.

66 MNL OL DL 104364.

67 Ibid.

68 ENGEL, ref. 39, entry Kórógyi.

Furthermore, she does not appear in other letters from the rich correspondence of her mistress, Katherine Bathyány.<sup>69</sup>

In terms of content, the more specified letter is the one from Magdalena Székely of Ormosd, the wife of Thomas of Seč (*Széchy*), the count of the Vas County. She sent it from her residence Felsőlendva (Vas County) to her mother Mrs. Ursula at the beginning of April 1524.<sup>70</sup> In addition to the already mentioned plans of Magdalena in the matter of her brother's education, we also learn other interesting facts from the everyday life of the late medieval Hungarian nobility. The letter is proof of the constant contacts of Hungarian noblewomen not only with their mothers but also with their sisters, long after they were married. They remained in touch with each other not only through letters or words, mediated by the messengers (as we may learn from this letter) but also thanks to frequent visits. Magdalena reminded her mother of one such visit, as she had heard from her sister Helen that their mother was visiting her other daughter, Mrs. Katherine, to help her with her forthcoming birth. That is why Magdalena desperately asked her mother whether she would come to her as well, as she was also feeling worse day by day and immediately needed a confidential and close person. She also complained that she could no longer find friends whom she could trust and rely on. She reminded her mother that she was the only one to whom such a position belonged (*singula, qua tali rei convenit*). She underlined the seriousness of the situation by the threat of not finding her daughter alive if her mother happened to delay her arrival. The reasons for these words of severe need were subsequently clarified by the words of unbelievable pain and the well-known fact that if the days before childbirth were painful, the childbirth itself might not turn out well. (*qualis et quantus dolor sit puerperii et res dubia vite*). Magdalena also wrote that she did not have the relics of Christ yet. She was supposed to receive them from Mrs. Margaret, the wife of John Bánffy. In case Mrs. Margaret still wanted to give them to her, she could send for them. As we learn from the letter, Margaret was Magdalena's sister. Then, Magdalena continued the rest of the letter with her plans to raise her brother, who lived with her, even though she was allegedly in pain.<sup>71</sup> The very content of the letter tells about the strong personality of its author, which is also confirmed by other sources, preserved to the life of Magdalena. Unlike the other mentioned noblewomen, she had a rich future ahead, who were the senders or addressees of the described letters in this study. This fact is supported by other mentions in contemporary sources. Let's

69 TERBE, Erika. *Bathyány Ferencné Svetkovics Katalin levelei (1538–1575)* [Letters of Katherine Svetkovics, wife of Ferenc Bathyány, 1538–1575]. Budapest: Magyar Nyelvtudományi társaság, 2010. ISBN 978-963-7530-97-5.

70 BÉKEFI, ref. 8, p. 196, p. 412, č. CCLXIV.

71 Ibid, p. 196, p. 412, no. CCLXIV.

mention one of the events of her rich life, namely her second marriage. She was married to the royal governor and the count of Szepes County, Alexei Thurzó. This marriage brought her to the territory of today's Slovakia, namely to Levoča or Trenčín.<sup>72</sup>

Magdalena's contemporaries were also noblewomen from the Dersffy family, Perpetua, Ferenc Batthyány's sister and her daughters. We have already mentioned Perpetua's letter in the introduction in connection with the upbringing of noble daughters. We will also finalise this research of the Hungarian noblewomen correspondence with this letter and describe everything that Perpetua wrote to her daughter Katherine, not just her mother's reproach about the constant complaints. At the beginning of the letter, the mother assured her daughter of her health as well as that of her sons, and she asked her to write again about her health as well. However, she was concerned about Katherine's complaints about her poverty and the accusation that they benefited more from her living at the influential court (*in potentem curiam*) than she herself. Her mother explained to her that the dress she asked for and which she had allegedly always wanted could not be sent to her, as they had expenses with doctors. Perpetua set as an example her sisters, who lived the same way at the courts of other nobles, but unlike her, they did not complain of their misery. On the contrary, they lived there in happiness and health. Elizabeth's daughter was sent to the court of Perpetua's brother Ferenc Batthyány. Another daughter (Akla?) was also there. She later worked at the queen's court, which made Perpetua very happy. She reminded Katherine that nothing was more important than health and she should not have complained about difficulties, especially not if she lived in an environment as she did.<sup>73</sup> From another source we learn that the mentioned dissatisfied daughter Katherine had been raised at the court of Anna Jagiellon, where she had the position of a court lady. A plea was also sent to the court of Archduke Ferdinand of Habsburg on behalf of Peter Pálffy who asked for permission to marry Katherine, the daughter of Nicolas Dersffy and especially Perpetua, the sister of the influential Ban of Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia Ferenc Batthyány. At that time, it was still customary for the lord of the court to be in charge of the selection and approval of a spouse for a court lady or a daughter of his familiar. Although the Hungarian king Louis Jagiellon (1516–1526) gave his consent to this marriage, the marriage did not

72 We may find a fragment of her tombstone to this day in Levoča's Church of St. James. LUDIKOVÁ, Zuzana – MIKÓ, Árpád. Pohrebné miesta a náhrobné pamiatky Thurzovcov [The funerals and tombstones of the Thurzó family]. In *Thurzovci a ich historický význam*. Tünde Lengyelová and coll. Bratislava: Pro Historia, 2012, p. 166. ISBN 978-80-89396-19-1. In connection with the researched topic, it is also interesting to mention Alexei's love letter to Magdalena, who was his fiancée in 1528. In the letter, he explained why he could not come to Felsőlendva to see her. MNL OL DL 24774 (with the incorrect date of 1525).

73 MNL OL DL 104464.

happen. Katherine allegedly married a Spaniard. Peter eventually married her sister Sophia.<sup>74</sup>

The last example also shows that the content of the preserved letters will acquire a wider meaning if we put it in relation to the knowledge of the genealogy of people and family lines associated with the letter. Many of the abovementioned examples are a unique evidence of the existence of some relationships; moreover, we can get to know many other people from family lines whose genealogy is known, but it is mostly compiled only from preserved documents. Although the letters primarily provide a subjective view of the situation (private or public), they often supplement information on well-known events. Last but not least, the medieval letters, especially those written or addressed by the Hungarian noblewomen, are a valuable contribution to the knowledge of everyday life and private life of the medieval Hungarian nobility, as it was mostly Hungarian noblewomen who stayed at home and dealt with situations connected with their current position.<sup>75</sup>

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74 JÁSZAY, Pál. *A magyar nemzet napjai a Mohácsi vész után I.* [The days of the Hungarian nation after the Battle of Mohács]. Pest, 1846, p. 419–421.

75 The study was created as part of a project VEGA no. 1/0241/21 *Communication Strategies of the Clergy in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary.*