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On the Edge of Historiography

Sources and Hungarica in Marin Sanudo's diary
Thesis booklet

I. The purpose of research

The aim of my doctoral research was to provide a comprehensive presentation of the diary-like contemporary historical work (*Diarii*) of Marin Sanudo (1466–1536). Sanudo, a Venetian nobleman, recorded events and information about the city from 1496 to 1533 in his diary, which comprises 59 manuscript volumes. Because of the confidentiality of the diplomatic material contained in the diary, the Council of Ten, Venice's state security body, sealed the manuscript after Sanudo's death, and the text was forgotten for more than 200 years. The *Diarii* was rediscovered at the end of the 18th century when international interest in Sanudo's work was revived. Scholars from many countries compiled national collections of sources from the diary, and Sanudo's minor works have started to be published. The work on the publication of *Diarii* began in 1879. Later on, the collections of sources were organized around certain historical events and phenomena, such as the Protestant Reformation, and Sanudo's work was also studied from the point of view of literature and linguistics.

In parallel with international research on Sanudo, Hungarian late medieval scholars have been intensively studying the diary since the mid-nineteenth century when the autographs, which were transported to Vienna as spoils of war, were first examined and extracted by Antal Gévy and later by Gusztáv Wenzel. Their interest was triggered by the lack of sources in Hungary from the 15-16th centuries, which the Sanudo diary mitigates at several points. In the last century and a half, Hungarian research has been based primarily on Wenzel's publication of selected sources, which means that, on the one hand, texts out of context can be misunderstood and, on the other, texts worthy of attention in terms of new research directions can avoid the attention of researchers. Later, the Italianist Magda Jászay, a researcher of Italian-Hungarian relations, and the historian Gábor Barta, an acknowledged expert on the Szapolyai era, exploited the *Diarii*, at this time based on the complete edition.

From a literary-historical point of view, the study of the *Diarii* provides an opportunity to explore a unique and hitherto only tangentially studied historiographical genre, the diary as a work of contemporary history, and to explore more thoroughly the historiographical program of Renaissance Venice.

The historical implications of this research are presented in terms of the potential challenges of using the Sanudo diary, drawing attention to the genre diversity of the often considered homogeneous text fragments, their different textological positions, and the resulting differences in their source value.

II. Studies performed

At the beginning of the research, I tried to explore the widest possible international literature on Sanudo's life and on the *Diarii*, the recent Sanudo dissertations of different approaches (linguistic and genre history) which were a great help to me.

I have compiled a detailed biography and career profile of Sanudo, and in connection with the latter, I have collected available texts and publications of his work to support future research focusing on the *Diarii*. Sanudo's work on the city of Venice known as *Cronachetta* was particularly helpful to me to interpret the functions of the councils, offices, and magistrates that also appear in the *Diarii*, and to imagine the city sites at the time.

In addition to the *Cronachetta*, the history of Venice periodized by the life of the Doges, the commentaries on the War of Ferrara (1482–1484), and the narrative of the campaign in Italy of the French King Charles VIII helped to outline the historiographical program that would culminate in the reworking of the material collected in the *Diarii* into a chronicle or rather a *historia*. Sanudo wanted to achieve the status of the official historian of Venice, but his abilities and social opportunities prevented him from achieving his goal.

I have concentrated my investigations on the *Diarii* specifically on the corpus of texts from the period 1526–1533, which was not covered by Gusztáv Wenzel's sourcebook. Although Wenzel had collected a large number of sources from the period ending at the battle of Mohács (1526), a review of these sources was timely in the context of the approaching 500th anniversary. By reading through the diaries and collecting the Hungarica sources, I was able to gain a comprehensive picture of the diversity of the texts included in the diaries.

By examining the different source groups (diary entries based on personal impressions, official correspondence, private letters, etc.) separately, I was able to discover the specificities of Sanudo's source management and his working methods. In the case of embedded texts in different textological states – summarised, translated, or (partially) copied – I tried to find other versions of the texts, sometimes the original, as far as possible, in order to compare them and examine Sanudo's textual procedures. In these cases, I used the tools of philological criticism. I have also used philological methods to compare the *Diarii*'s text with independently discovered archival documents in the course of specifically historical research, in several cases identifying textual variants that can be compared with the diary excerpts.

III. Results

Marin Sanudo may not have rivaled the humanist geniuses in terms of talent and artistic creativity, but his stubborn diligence literally made him a part of the cultural history of the Republic of Venice. His monumental diary and smaller historical works are monuments to the *Serenissima* at the height of its power. Given the Republic's position in the European information network, which at the time was practically worldwide, its history would not be complete without the news and information that flowed through it, which has also survived in the pages of the *Diarii*.

In Venice, a rich but purpose-driven, propagandistic tradition of historiography developed in the early 16th century, which motivated Sanudo to create, but which he could not identify with. Although, as a Venetian nobleman, he himself wished to promote the salvation of the Republic, he did not do so by uncritical glorification, but by collecting and transmitting intellectual and artistic values and teaching future generations to avoid the vicissitudes of political life. He sought to achieve his former aim by his particular method of listing and collecting, and the latter by writing in the vernacular and using a style close to the direct, chancery style of expression. While Sanudo did not achieve public success in his lifetime, ignoring the demands of the Venetian aristocracy, the political establishment recognized the value of his work, which is an important factor in the intact survival of the *Diarii*. And by the end of the 16th century, the cultural transformation had arrived, which stimulated interest in Sanudo's descriptive writings, quasi-guidebooks. Francesco Sansovino, one of the most prominent exponents of this genre, also profited from the available Sanudo works, especially the *Cronachetta*.

Sanudo's interest in epigraphy and his collections of texts, his unique library, and the artistic and scientific curiosities that adorned his home, together with his work as a historian, especially his *Diarii*, which had previously been regarded as a dry set of data, allow us to appreciate his work in a different light. Looking at the sources of the diary, which is richly packed with embedded texts, it is clear that Sanudo used his diary to preserve and chronologically organize his extraordinary written and even occasionally visual documents. In this light, the *Diarii* can be seen not as a set of data but as a *cabinet of curiosities*, in which Marin Sanudo collected a wide range of texts, from printed matter reporting on inexplicable atmospheric phenomena and freaks to political poems and the special *intitulatio*, introductory self-naming of Sultan Suleiman's letters.

However, the order provided by the collection and the passage of time cannot replace the unified narrative that the audience expects from historians. It is for this reason that the most frequent criticism of Sanudo's work, especially the *Diarii*, is his method of not narrating events in context, since, according to Benedetto Croce, 'where there is no narrative [...] there is no history', that is, the moral meaning of historiography,

which was indeed required in Renaissance society, can be achieved through the plotting and narrativization of events. In light of recent research, however, we are not forced to exclude *Diarii* from historiography. In examining the possibilities and techniques of narrativizing historical events, Hayden White identifies several levels of historical representation, using historiography in a narrow sense, as the designation of the highest level, below which is the chronicle, and below both the annals. White defines four criteria for historiography: full narrativity, a proper concern for the judicious handling of evidence, respect for the chronological order of events, and the revelation of their structure, and their order of meaning. From this alone it is clear that Sanudo has reached a lower level of historical representation because, despite treating his sources with full respect and the objectivity one would expect, he has not investigated the internal structure and motives of events, he can only guarantee the original order of events in the case of the events in Venice and, finally – and most importantly – he does not create a narrative sequence of events, he does not plot them. This presupposes that certain elements of the collected material and events are highlighted, which Sanudo, as we have seen, did not do; the pages of *Diarii* are equally weighted with news and fake news, printed matter and letters, rumors, and diplomatic dispatches. Sanudo's diary can thus be classified as an anti-narrative form of historical representation, annals in White's terms, or at most a naive chronicle. They can also be acceptable alternatives to historiography, which is necessarily linked to a state and driven by some social system. The failure of Sanudo's career is explained precisely by his critical distance from the Venetian state, even though he had a need to moralize and communicate moral values, and this is evident in his objectives and in his comments on the failings of the Venetian institutional system. But he could not do this without a moral basis that idealized a state, and so he was stuck at the level of an annals-like historical representation, driven only by the passage of time, which at the same time allowed a universal, non-cultural communication of events. Thus, when Sanudo's diary is degradingly called a data set by scholars, they are calling it to account for narrative procedures whose possible results could only be extracted from the historical facts readily available in *Diarii* through painstaking work.

They have been preserved almost as primary sources, often in the form of official correspondence and dispatches between states and within the Republic of Venice, in the form of public *avvisos* and private letters, framed by a Sanudo-like narrative of Venetian urban life and word-of-mouth gossips. Nevertheless, the sources included must be examined with particular care and philological acuity, since they are mediated versions of texts. The effective evaluation is made difficult by specific situations such as Sanudo's stay in Verona. In order to accurately assess the value of the data recorded in the diary during such periods, it is essential to know the biography of the author and possible intermediary sources. But even in the routinely accumulated material of thirty-

seven years of work, there are several versions of a text. It is useful to compare and replace these texts with copies that have survived in fragments, to distinguish between excerpted copies and more extensive summaries like Sanudo's, and not to ignore simple extracts and mentions of documents that contain essential data and may point to other possible sources.

The importance of the Sanudo diary was recognized in time by the Hungarian scientific community, and it was used successfully in historical, literary, and cultural studies. The central importance of the sources preserved in the *Diarii* was already emphasized by Gusztáv Wenzel in the context of the diaries of the envoys, the characterization of the nobles of Hungary, and the state of affairs in the country. Tracing the loss of territory in the southern part of Hungary during the period of the Ottoman conquest is particularly important and can also be performed using Sanudo's work in a credible and detailed manner. In addition to relevant and authoritative data, the *Diarii* also provides unique – though in all likelihood incorrect – sources for historical myths such as the legend about sending György Dózsa's severed head to Szeged. This, and the pseudo-news about the battle of Mohács, clearly point to the dangers of *Diarii*'s unreflective use, which can be avoided by keeping in mind the complexity of the work, Sanudo's working method, and the communication habits of the time.

In this way, we can gain sources thought to be lost, more detailed biographies, more solid research into the history of diplomacy, a more accurate picture of late-medieval news circulation, and many other results from further research into *Diarii*, as I have shown it in several case studies. The missions of the diplomat and prelate Fülöp Csulai Móré to Venice have been explored more thoroughly than ever before through more extensive source research, and the trips of 1508 and 1509–1510, previously considered as one mission, have been separated. The only text attributed to Csulai Móré, but of dubious authorship, can certainly be ascribed to him in the light of the Sanudo entries.

By examining the sources for the battle of Mohács in a broader time frame, including the Sanudo texts written after September 1526 and the related archival sources, it was possible to gain a more accurate picture of the information behind the various politically influenced narratives of the battle. The research also shed light on the activities of János Statileo in Mohács. It is also in the context of the battle of Mohács that we can observe the workings of the Venetian papal legate and his attempts to influence the flow of information, who was part of the only diplomatic network comparable to that of Venice – the system of papal nuncios and legates – in a highly complex and charged political situation.

As for the period following Mohács, Gábor Barta was extremely meticulous in his work, processing almost all of the Sanudo data, while the letters of Szapolyai copied into the *Diarii* also made it possible in some cases to clarify the itinerary of the monarch.

IV. Publications of the candidate on the subject

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- SZOVÁK Márton. „Vendégoldalak. Mediális átvételek Marin Sanudo naplójában”. In *Közvetítők és közvetítés. A kulturális transzfer a hosszú reformáció kontextusában*, 39–53. Reciti Konferenciakötetek 12. Budapest: reciti, 2021.
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- SZOVÁK, Márton. „Nuove fonti veneziane sulla battaglia di Mohács”. *Nuova Antologia Militare*, IV (2023): 7–39.