

Doctoral (PhD) theses

Dóra Baráth

**Network of English diplomats in the  
Holy Roman Empire  
between 1541 and 1547 and their  
correspondence about Hungary**

Supervisor: Sándor Óze DSc

Pázmány Péter Catholic University  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Doctoral School of Historical Research

Budapest  
2023

## **The aim, background and sources of the research**

The 1540s were an eventful decade from both a Hungarian and a European point of view: the loss of Buda in 1541, the failure of the imperial campaign in 1542 and the Turkish conquests of the following years perpetuated the division of Hungary into three parts until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; and in Europe the Italian Wars, the preparations for the Council of Trent and the internal conflicts of the Holy Roman Empire that culminated in the Schmalkaldic War were extremely decisive for the later ages too. In addition to military and religious conflicts, however, the image created by diplomatic relations and the flow of information greatly influenced the foreign policy of rulers, so their analysis can bring us closer to understanding the conflicts of the era.

The aim of this dissertation was to present the network of the English diplomats working in the territory of the Holy Roman Empire between 1541 and 1547, the information-gathering of English diplomacy about Hungary, and to investigate the connections and relationships of European and Hungarian events and processes based on these reports.

The time frame is justified by changes in the diplomatic network, which is clearly visible from the change in the sending and receiving parties occurring in the source material. Shortly after the arrest of Thomas Cromwell (June 1540), the correspondence network was

also transformed, since together with the disgraced state secretary, several of the diplomats also lost their positions, new diplomats appeared, or old ones returned, and the management of the diplomatic network fell into the hands of new state secretaries. The death of the English monarch, Henry VIII is an obvious closing date because under the new rulers (Edward VI and Mary), the diplomatic network changed again, but during the examined period, it shows relative stability. The period can also be treated as a unit regarding the king's domestic and foreign policy, since the *Privy* Council and the Secretary of State, William Paget assumed a decisive role in governance by the 1540s. From the Hungarian point of view, Buda's capture by the Turks, then the unsuccessful imperial campaign to recapture it in 1542, and the treaty of Adrianople are also reasonable starting and ending points.

I examined a part of the source material in my undergraduate thesis in history: the reports of two English diplomats, Christopher Mont (1496/7–1572) and Walter Bucler (?–1554/8), serving in the territory of the Holy Roman Empire, focusing on their information content about Hungary. For my PhD dissertation, I extended the research to all ambassadors and agents working in the territory of the Holy Roman Empire, whose correspondence can be found in the *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII* calendars. From the collection, I compiled 1,355 letters sent from or to the territory of the Holy Roman Empire, and based on the calendars, I added another 100

letters that were only mentioned there to the database. In addition to the letters from the Empire, I examined 126 Venetian letters (sent from or to Venice) and 17 only mentioned Venetian letters, since the Venetian English correspondents were organically connected to the imperial network, and their reports often contained Hungarian-related information, so they were worthy of content analysis. The database therefore contains a total of 1,598 letters, of which I used 1,455 Imperial letters to outline the diplomatic network.

## **Research methodology**

One of the most important developments in new diplomatic history is actor-centeredness, that is, diplomats are seen as thinking and acting individuals who were able to “*reflect on their situation, make requests, make decisions and show them in their behavior, and change their environment through their behavior.*”<sup>1</sup> Getting to know the practical functioning of diplomacy can show possible alternative developments and broaden our knowledge of social, economic and political action. Although newsletters and public letters began to appear in the period examined by the dissertation, in terms of the flow of news and information, handwritten letters and diplomatic reports still played a crucial role. The examination of the content of

---

<sup>1</sup> Strohmeyer, Arno: *Trendek és perspektívák a kora újkori diplomáciatörténetben.* [Trends and Perspectives in Early Modern Diplomatic History] *Történelmi Szemle* 59 (2017) No. 2 p. 177–198. Here p. 182-183.

the letters – for which I used the original copies of the letters, 19th century transcripts and modern calendars as well – enables the discovery of what the English commissioners considered worthy of mention and transmission of the events in Hungary, that is, what information about the situation in Hungary and in the Holy Roman Empire was available to the English foreign policy and to what extent was it used in the formation of foreign policy.

However, historical figures and events must always be examined in the structures that surround them - it is not enough to investigate the diplomats or the content of their letters, since the environment in which they operated and wrote is at least as important. In addition to the political, economic, and cultural environment, it is also necessary to examine the network of social relations in order to understand how English diplomacy worked in the era. The letters themselves clearly offer the possibility of network analysis and visualization. Outlining a network forces the researcher to think in terms of systematic collection, enables a more transparent and complete exploration of the source material, and the empirical testing of previously proposed hypotheses or the establishment of new ones based on the knowledge of the drawn relationship network.

A network is a system of connections between objects or persons; the basic concepts of its analysis are the nodes (vertices, actors, agents) and the connections between them (edges, links),

together we call them a graph; a network consists of one or more graphs. In this research, the letter-writing English diplomats are the actors of the network, and the letters are the edges or links that connect them. The primary property of a network to be determined is whether the connections are directed or undirected. In this case, these are directed relationships, which point from the writer of the letter to the recipient and can be reciprocated or unreciprocated depending on whether the letters were answered. For the graphic display of the network, a database made of relevant data from the sources can provide a quantitative aspect, and the analysis of the role of individual actors can provide a qualitative aspect to the research. From the data, it is possible to outline who was in contact with whom, how regular or occasional these contacts were, i.e., whether we can already speak of a vibrant diplomatic network at the beginning of the formation of resident embassies, and if so, which ambassadors were the key figures of this network. The methodology of this research is therefore rather qualitative, although I also used quantitative elements and statistical methods of network research to prove the importance of individual actors.

## **Results and conclusion**

By examining the nature of the English diplomatic assignments and the ways of information flow, I tried to present to the reader a case study of the diplomacy of the era, which is worth comparing with the functioning of other European diplomatic networks. During

the examination of the professionalizing English diplomatic network in the 1540s, the leading role of one of the state secretaries, William Paget, was clearly shown, who after the fall of Thomas Cromwell can be considered the center of the English diplomatic network, the key figure in the communication between the ambassadors and the ruler. The statistical analysis of the network has shown that Paget was the receiver of most letters in the court, and if we consider that he was the one who interpreted the letters addressed to the king and the council to Henry VIII, his role is even more significant. Similarly, the mediating role of merchants and agents in the Netherlands, including Stephen Vaughan, in bringing continental news to the court became visible, and based on the content analysis of the letters, the active relationship of Venice – and the English diplomat there, Edmund Harvell – with the agents and ambassadors working in the Holy Roman Empire was also confirmed.

The examination of the contents of the correspondence provided an opportunity to reveal the speed of information exchange and the channels through which the news reached the English court. In addition to the newly established official European postal network, the prominent role of merchants and couriers commissioned by the diplomats or the court can also be seen in the calendars; comments on the difficult financial situation of the agents and the dangers of the roads are also often mentioned in the letters. An overview of the careers of the diplomats who sent the reports showed that many of

them also started their careers as couriers or secretaries of other ambassadors.

The varied foreign policy of the last years of Henry VIII was covered less in the international literature than the younger years of the monarch, and the Turkish expansion in Hungary in the 1540s received less emphasis in the Hungarian literature as well. At the same time, both are worthy of research, and the chosen source material provides new data for both. In addition to the well-known diplomats of Henry VIII, the correspondence reveals the figure of János Beriszló, a Hungarian diplomat in English service, who fulfilled his commission decades before the first English ambassador in Istanbul. Based on the correspondence between Thomas Seymour and Georg von Heideck, it can be concluded that Heideck, an agent also in English service, was most likely entrusted with leading the cavalry of the 1542 imperial campaign. Thomas Seymour stayed with the imperial army all the way, and in his reports, he described the mood in the camp and the movement of the army in detail to his ruler, and he even had an audience with Ferdinand I. After the campaign was unsuccessful, both Seymour and Christopher Mont reported on the supposed reasons for the failure: the lack of pay, the treachery of the Hungarians, the weather and epidemics also appeared in their reports. In the following years, mainly Edmund Harvell, who served in Venice, wrote about the events in Hungary, and in his frequent reports he provided relatively accurate



information about the armies and castle captures of the Turks. In addition to Harvell, the letters of Christopher Mont, Georg von Heideck and Nicholas Wotton often contained news about Hungary.

The English reports not only conveyed to the English court the dates of the events of the Turkish expansion in Hungary, the supposed or real sizes of the armies, but also gave an image of the Germans, Hungarians and Turks. In the Holy Roman Empire, which was on the verge of the Schmalkaldic War, in addition to the conflicts of the Reformation and Catholicism, the threat from outside, the horror of the pagan Turks, constantly determined the fears of the locals and English diplomats working there, which they often voiced in their letters. The diplomats were also aware of the intertwining of the events, and I tried to emphasize it in my dissertation: the new phase of the Italian wars, the Imperial diets divided due to the Reformation, and the Turkish expansion influenced each other and cannot be separated.

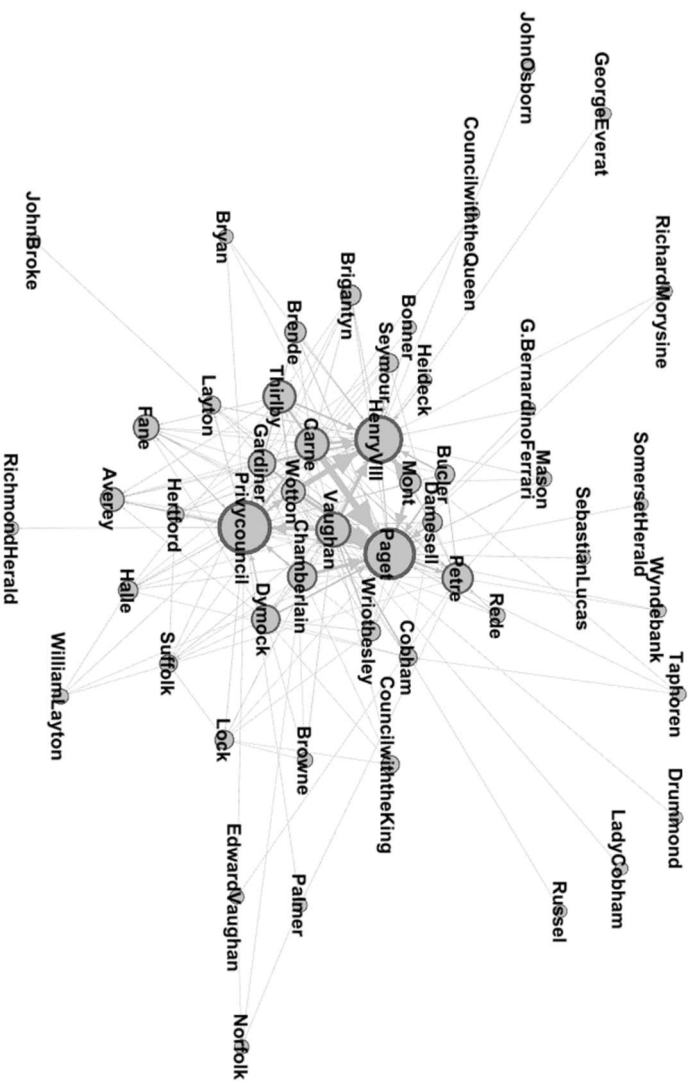
## Relevant publications:

### Studies:

- Christopher Mont levelei – alig ismert követi jelentések a 16. századból.* In: Habitus. Tanulmányok a Colloquium Officiale II konferencia előadásából. Szerk. Baráth Dóra – Kiss Alpár. Budapest 2016. 63–89.
- Angol követi hálózata a Német-Római Birodalomban 1541 és 1547 között.* In: Metszéspontok: Tanulmányok a középkorról és a kora újkorról. Szerk. Véber Zoltán – Virágh Ágnes. Debrecen 2023. 120–136.

### Presentations:

- Christopher Mont levelei – alig ismert követi jelentések a 16. századból*  
2015. 04. 23. Colloquium Officiale II. Budapest, ELTE BTK Szekfű Gyula Könyvtár
- A smalkaldeni háború előszöve – Vallás és háború Christopher Mont leveleiben.*  
2016. 03. 31. Arma – Colloquium Officiale III. konferencia Budapest, ELTE BTK Szekfű Gyula Könyvtár
- Magyar és egyetemes történet összefonódása a XVI. század közepén – VIII. Henrik kori angol követi levelezések vizsgálata*  
2019. 04. 11. Salamander – konferencia a történeti kutatás társadalmi céljáról és hasznáról Budapest, ELTE Egyetemi Könyvtár
- Angol követi jelentések a Német-római Birodalomból (1542-1546)*  
2019. 05. 03. XXII. Tavasz Szél Konferencia Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetem
- 1542-1546 közötti angol követi jelentések vizsgálata a hálózatelemzés módszerével*  
2019. 06. 06. Információ és társadalom. Közvetítő rendszerek, médiumok és hatalomgyakorlás a kora újkori Európában. Budapest, ELTE BTK Szekfű Gyula Könyvtár
- Angol követi hálózata a Német-Római Birodalomban 1541 és 1547 között*  
2021. 10. 15-16. Conferentia Debreceniensis Doctorandorum Iuvenum (CDDI). Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetem
- Letters of English diplomats in the Holy Roman Empire between 1541 and 1547 and their reports about Hungary*  
2021. 11. 12-13. 10th Jubilee Interdisciplinary Doctoral Conference, Pécs, Pécsi Tudományegyetem



Network of Correspondents [Force Atlas graph made with Gephi]

