THE JAGIELLONIANS IN EUROPE: DYNASTIC DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS

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The Jagiellonians in Europe: Dynastic diplomacy and foreign relations
THE JAGIELLONIANS IN EUROPE:
DYNASTIC DIPLOMACY AND
FOREIGN RELATIONS

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The Jagiellonians and post-1541 Hungary

Szymon Brzeziński

Dynastic policy and its limits: the Jagiellonians and post-1541 Hungary

Several decades ago the American historian Paula Sutter Fichtner pointed out the limits of the Habsburg dynasticism in struggle for Hungary in the 1540s. Based on the events of 1542, she indicated that dynastic connections of this ruling house, although strong, proved as not sufficient to provide tools to restrain the Ottoman rule in Hungary.\(^1\) Realization of dynastic potential rested upon fragile cooperation of its members. Moreover, the case of Ferdinand I and the House of Habsburg in fight for Hungary in 1542 reflected a general discrepancy of the contemporary rulers, frequently forced to maneuver between interests of the dynasty, own country and depending territories.\(^2\) More recently, a similar conclusion drew Zoltán Korpás in his analysis of the Emperor Charles V’s pragmatic, but not unconcerned attitude toward Hungary and the war against the Ottomans in Central Europe.\(^3\) With reference to this opinions on Habsburg policy I give a brief outline of key aspects of the policy of Sigismund I and Sigismund II August, Kings of Poland and Grand Dukes of Lithuania, toward Hungary in the 1540s.

This period is important for several reasons. First of all, it faced an essential geopolitical shift in South-Eastern Europe as the Ottoman expansion led to the tripartite division of Hungary in 1541. The event caused a significant resonance in the Jagiellonian countries, comparable to the defeat of Mohács. In the following years the division of Hungary and its permanence became even clearer as the attempts to integrate the remains of medieval Hungary and to stop the Ottomans failed. Parallel to that, an eastern Hungarian state came into being, which later became Principality of Transylvania. The key roles in it were played by non-dynastic actors, above all the influential bishop and treasurer George Martinuzzi (known also as Brother George/Frăter György) and Peter Petrovics, ban of Temesvár. As Isabel of Jagiellon, daughter of King Sigismund I of Poland, married John Zapolya in 1539, her brother and heir of the Polish-

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\(^2\) Ibid., 406–407.

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Lithuanian throne Sigismund August in 1543 after several years of postponed negotiations married Elisabeth of Austria, daughter of Ferdinand I. The relations with the Ottoman Empire were based upon the Polish-Ottoman treaty from 1533 and remained stable despite the permanent tensions in the borderland region. Therefore, the Jagiellonians were diplomatically bound to major actors of the conflict in the Carpathian Basin. Moreover, this involved dynastic ties with antagonists in the struggle for Hungary.

Recently historiography largely contributed to our understanding of the process of the Ottoman conquest of Hungary, the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry and shaping of the Transylvanian state, together with its external and internal factors. I do not attempt to summarize its results here. However, I think there is a need to reconsider some opinions on Polish-Hungarian relations in this period. For example, Janusz Pajewski, author of an impactful pre-war Polish monograph on the Polish policy toward Hungary between 1540 and 1571, blamed Sigismund I for a ‘lack of policy toward Hungary’ and opposed the ‘weak’ Sigismund to Bona, his royal consort, which he perceived as a main author of the Polish policy in Hungarian matters. This kind of dual diplomacy was perceived then as a cause of failure, expressed by the decisions of the 1549 Habsburg-Jagiellonian treaty of Prague. That view, in somewhat moderated form, was basically shared also by more recent authors. A much more balanced approach presented by


Anna Sucheni-Grabowska. According to her research, the Jagiellonians did not abandon active policy towards Hungary, but were forced to reemphasize their goals by growing importance of Baltic, Livonian and Muscovite issues.\(^7\)

It seems necessary then to highlight the continuity of Jagiellonian diplomacy. Contrary to widespread chronological patterns, the so-called ‘Jagiellonian age’ in Hungary did not end with the disaster of 1526. The dynasty continued to affect the country after this date – mainly due to the fact that Isabel of Jagiellon remained Queen of Hungary up to her death in 1559. Both her widowhood (as of July 1540) and endangered reign strengthened the role of bonds with the family of origin. That also concerned her son, John Sigismund, who later made use of his Jagiellonian kinship.

Both marriages, that of Isabel with John Zapolya and of Sigismund August with Elisabeth, were parallel political steps and just seemingly in contradictory directions. The marriage of Isabel with Zapolya was a counterweight to the strengthened position of the House of Habsburg in Central Europe. Both contracts revealed an unchanged belief in effectiveness of dynastic policy in securing the country’s and the dynasty’s position.\(^8\) In case of the marriage with Zapolya, it proved to be more durable and decisive than many agreements or treaties, negotiated and signed so eagerly in those years by Habsburgs, the Zapolyan (Transylvanian) and Polish sides in order to settle the situations of Hungary.\(^9\) However, the situation in Hungary became highly complicated in consequence of the events of 1540 and 1541: the birth of Zapolya’s heir, the death of Zapolya, the failed military attempts of Ferdinand to occupy whole Hungary and finally but decisively, the Ottoman seizure of Buda and central Hungary. Dynastic marriage undoubtedly remained an eligible mean of

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diplomacy in settling down the Hungarian issues, as revealed by repeated efforts to arrange marriages of the widowed Isabel and, later, of John Sigismund.\textsuperscript{10} Meaningful remains an example from 1545, when the Habsburg agents spread a rumour about planned marriage of John Sigismund with (intended to be baptized) daughter of sultan, what should have secured the Zapolya's heir rule over vast part of Hungary.\textsuperscript{11} Yet, the contest for Hungary with the Ottomans was not to be settled by such means, well-known for European side of the conflict.\textsuperscript{12} The situation demanded other instruments of diplomacy and statecraft, which could help to meet the changing conditions in the region.

The first major motive of the Jagiellonian policy toward Hungary after Zapolya's death were the family relations, that is, the fate of Queen Isabel and her estates in Hungary. In the 1540s it remained a main issue in the dynasty's relations with Hungary, Austria, and Ottoman Empire. As Sigismund I ensured Ferdinand I in January 1541, Isabel's dowry was then the limit of Jagiellonian ambitions in Hungary.\textsuperscript{13} Of course it cannot be a surprise at all, but we should notice that the family relations of Jagiellonians appeared as very close, even if we consider the usual courtesy, expressed in correspondence and also keep in mind

\begin{flushleft}


\textsuperscript{12} See: Gábor \textsc{Ágoston}, 'Az oszmán és az európai diplomácia a kölcsonösség felé vezető úton' [The Ottoman and the European diplomacy on the road to mutuality], in Péter \textsc{Hanák} and Mariann \textsc{Nagy} (eds.), \textit{Híd a századok felett. Támluénymok Katus László 70. születésnapjára}, Pécs 1997, 83–99; Arno \textsc{Strohmeyer}, 'Das Osmanische Reich – ein Teil des europäischen Staatsystems der Frühen Neuzeit?', in Marlene \textsc{Kurz} et al. (eds.), \textit{Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburgermonarchie}, Wien/München 2005, pp.149–64.; Daniel \textsc{Goffman}, 'Negotiating with the Renaissance state: the Ottoman Empire and the new diplomacy', in Virginia H. \textsc{Aksan} and Daniel \textsc{Goffman} (eds.), \textit{The Early Modern Ottomans. Remapping the Empire}, New York 2007, pp.61–74; A. Nuri \textsc{Yurdusev} (ed.), \textit{Ottoman Diplomacy. Conventional or Unconventional?}, Basingstoke 2004; Moritz \textsc{Csáky}, 'Ideen orid 'Realpolitik' Ungarische Varianten der europäischen Türkentpolitik im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert', \textit{Anzeiger der Philosophisch-Historischen Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften} 120:7 (1983), 176–95.

\textsuperscript{13} Sigismund's instruction for envoy Andrzej Czarnkowski: Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych (The Central Archives of Historical Records, Warsaw), Metryka Koronna, Libri Legationum [hereinafter: AGAD, LL] vol. 7, f.137–142; edition: Péter \textsc{Tóth} (ed.), \textit{A lengyel körülj pécseléria libri legationum sorozatának magyar vonatkozású tratat} [The Hungarian-related documents of the Libri legationum series of the Polish Royal Chancellery], Miskolc 2003, II.403–7. [hereinafter: \textsc{Tóth} 2003]
\end{flushleft}
some serious conflicts, which later emerged between the family members because of Sigismund August's marriages. Things did not change, however, in the relations of the royal parents toward Isabel. She was their beloved child, just as her brother. Significantly, that relation was expressed also in the marriage contract of Isabel. Royal letters to her were full of warmth and care. King Sigismund for many times hurried his daughter to deliver news about her and her welfare — as in June 1539, when he stated that he expected a courier from her for a long time and that is why he decided to send his own with greetings. This was especially apparent in the first months and years of Isabel's reign in Hungary and was obviously even strengthened by the dramatic events of 1540–1541. This attitude did not change in the following years. After 1541, the royal worries concerned Isabel's security, revenues and court. The latter was expected to be 'proper', that is, corresponding to her royal descent and dignity. The problem returned again and again in the 1540s because of the internal struggle in Transylvania of Martinuzzi and his followers and on the other hand, of Petrovics and other supporters of the Zapolias. Especially painful for Isabel were accusations against her raised by Martinuzzi to her parents. What is noteworthy, the diplomatic actions in Isabel's interest were frequently undertaken jointly by her royal parents. This was the case in December 1542, when the envoy of Ferdinand I, Gáspár Serédy, reported to his sovereign that Sigismund and Bona were real authors of Isabel's policy, carried on 'ex suggestione regis ac præsertim reginae Poloniae' — which was, by the way, an answer to the numerous former requests of the widowed queen. Similar views expressed also another informer of Ferdinand, Maciej Łobocki, reporting on the attitude of the Polish royal pair toward the 1542 treaty of Gyalu/Giläu between Ferdinand and Isabel.

Not only Sigismund and Bona tried to interfere the situation on behalf of Isabel. From mid-1540s Sigismund August joined them in these efforts, which coincided with his growing role after he took over rule in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1544. In his letter to Martinuzzi from 1546 he insisted on safeguarding the sister's security and adequate conditions (meaning proper

14 BORKOWSKA 2000, 48.

15 Biblioteka Czartoryskich w Krakowie (Czartoryski Library, Cracow), Teki Naruszewicza [hereinafter: TN], 56.675, no. 134.


court and financial conditions of the household), that is, he joined the efforts and argumentation of his parents. As Sigismund August assured Isabel in June 1548, shortly after he succeeded his father, looking after sister was indispensable part of the royal offcium. He undertook the duty to look after unmarried sisters and widowed Isabel. It meant he declared to continue to use this argument as a tool in his policy. The next years of his reign showed that he was able to use this position in diplomatic mediation between the Zapolyas (Isabel and John Sigismund) and Ferdinand I. That was the aim of the 1549 Transylvanian legation of bishop Andrzej Zebrzydowski who previously already served as envoy in Hungarian matters to Ferdinand in 1543. The 1549 treaty of Prague between Sigismund August and Ferdinand settled down the relations between two monarchs, among them also the Hungarian issue. It did not mean an abandonment of Hungarian policy and still gave Jagiellonians some possibilities to take advantage of Queen Isabel’s rights, even if her situation actually became a real burden for her brother.

As Queen of Hungary Isabel met serious difficulties in exercising her power in the 1540s. She remained largely dependent to hostile parties and often seemed to be an object of other policies. Organization of power in the Transylvanian state made it harder to constitute a centre of royal authority with adequate resources, which could be then influenced by usual means. It was caused by the essential role of non-dynastic actors (above all Martinuzzi) and rapidly changing political relations and loyalties. It was not without a reason that the Jagiellonian diplomacy so constantly insisted on providing Isabel proper financial background to exercise her power. Additionally, the Jagiellonian dynasticism met serious difficulties in the late 1540s originating from the relations of the members of the dynasty. Because of internal conflicts between the members of the royal family (above all between Queen Bona and Sigismund August) and as a result of age and worsening health of Sigismund I the marriages of Jagiellonian

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19 Biblioteka Kórnicka PAN (Polish Academy of Sciences, Kórnik Library), Ms 221, f.164–6.
20 Ibid., f.444–6.
22 HHStA, Staatsabteilungen Polen, Karton 6, Konv. 1, f.63–9; Sucheni-grabowska 1981.
princesses were delayed until 1550s (Sophia) and 1560s (Catherine). That fact influenced the dynasty’s effectiveness in relations with other ruling houses. Death of Elisabeth of Austria in 1545 undermined the Habsburg alliance. Decease of the aged monarch and shift on the Polish-Lithuanian throne made it necessary for the Jagiellonians to renew the alliances with Habsburgs and Ottomans. This need affected their attitude to the Hungarian issues after 1548.

Parallel to that challenges the Jagiellonians noticeably tended to rely on Isabel’s opinion in matters that concerned her and her reign. At the end of 1541, Sigismund I, Bona and Sigismund August stated in the joint mission to Isabel that they wish to help her, but not to enforce anything upon her against her will. As they directly wrote, she should not rely solely on their opinions, as they want to follow her mind. This view repeated in the following years. It may be considered as an excuse and solely diplomatic trick, which aimed to keep a convenient distance in highly complicated Hungarian matters. But it is equally justified to interpret such words as an evidence of close family relations and careful usage of them in foreign policy. Behavior of Isabel after death of Sigismund I supports this view. As she emphasized to the Porte in October 1548, close family ties will not urge her to leave Hungary.

Undoubtedly the fate and security of Isabel and her son were a chief matter for the Jagiellonians in their south-eastern diplomacy. From this perspective, an opinion of Jagiellonian ‘withdrawal’ from Hungary in this period seems to be a misinterpretation. It does not mean that the dynasty’s policy did not evolve: in 1541–1542 the royal parents clearly advised Isabel to return to Poland, even if they treated such a decision only as temporary. In the following years, after the failure of Habsburg attempts to regain Hungary in 1542, proven elusiveness of Ferdinand’s promises according Isabel’s future Hungarian domains and – last but not least – considerable military successes of Ottoman armies in the Carpathian Basin, the main goal of the Jagiellonians was to prevent an internal conflict in Transylvania and strengthen the position of the new country in order to avoid further Ottoman expansion in the region. A plan to send Isabel back to Poland appeared again in 1548, but it was not initiated by the Jagiellonians.

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24 Joint legation of Sigismund I, Sigismund August and Bona to Isabel, 25 November 1541, Ossol., Ms 179/II, f.197–198; TN, 58.381–4., no. 86.

25 See: Tcki Górskiego, 23.13–14 (legation of Sigismund I to Isabel, 16 August 1542), 35 (March 1543), 96–97 (Sigismund’s answer to the legation from Isabel, in June 1543, concerning her doubts whether to stay in Transylvania or leave the country).

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Another question is, what use the dynasty made out of the family ties. It is noteworthy to examine the arguments by which the royal policy tried to explain key decisions. In correspondence with political actors outside the family, the responsibilities emerging from valid alliances, above all with the Ottomans, dominated the family’s duties. The cautious attitude of King Sigismund, characteristic also for his earlier policy toward Hungary, was present after Isabel’s marriage as well. In January 1540 in the letter to Piotr Kmita, the voivode of Cracow, he distinguished that in the Hungarian question there were ‘public’ and ‘private matters’. He declared the ‘public’ ones as more important in making decisions.\(^{27}\) However, at that time, the king concentrated on ‘private matter’, that is, securing Isabel’s property in Hungary and declared his readiness to abandon serious plans in his Hungarian policy\(^{28}\). After Zapolya’s death the king constantly refused to help militarily (as in a letter from 13th August 1540 to Petrovics and Martinuzzi).\(^{29}\) As he repeatedly described his situation, using a phrase by Plautus from Erasmian Adagia, he found himself ‘between the shrine and the stone’\(^{30}\). In a letter to Hungarian lords loyal to Isabel at the beginning of 1541 he used threats from Muscovy and Tatars as an excuse. ‘It is easy to start the war’ – claimed Sigismund – ‘but it is hard to finish it’\(^{31}\).

A major reason behind this policy was the will to maintain peaceful relations with the sultan. On the other hand, Sigismund was well aware of his duties toward daughter and grandson, as he expressed his doubts in the aforementioned letter to senators, asking them for advice in August 1540.\(^{32}\) The ‘public’ prevailed in the king’s argumentation for the Emperor Charles V from 5 October 1540: ‘Dear is our daughter to us, dear is her son, but dearer is the good and peace of the Christian commonwealth’.\(^{33}\) Such declarations were rather rhetoric, as the Jagiellonian diplomacy served both goals: to secure a possibly best and

\(^{27}\) Ossol., Ms 179/II, f.36–38; TN, 57.4–5, no. 2.

\(^{28}\) Sigismund I to Ferdinand I, 10 January 1540, Ossol., Ms 179/II, f.40v–41.

\(^{29}\) AGAD, LL, vol. 9, f.9r–11 (Tőth 2003, no. 146); TN, 57.455–7, no. 121.


\(^{31}\) Ossol., Ms 179/II, f.46.


firm position for the family and to keep as large part of Hungary out of direct
governmental authority as possible.

In decisive for Hungary the early 1540s and in the following period as well
the Jagiellonian diplomacy had indeed dual character. This dualism, however,
should not be described through diversity of policies ('active' Bona vs. 'weak'
or 'lukewarm' Sigismund), but as dualism of principles of dynastic policy and
pragmatic approach. Nevertheless, the dynastic ('private') goals were interrelated
with those defined as 'public', state interests. Separating or opposing them
according to modern patterns would be artificial. The royal diplomacy used
both arguments, depending on the recipient. I suggest then to be very careful
in applying the modern idea of the 'reason of state' to this policy. It had much
more common with classical understanding of this idea and with a type of ruler
promoted by Erasmus. Therefore, it is more useful to consider this policy as
cautious continuation, a careful and tactic 'appeasement', as a matter of fact, an
effect of so carefully maintained relations of Jagiellonians with the Ottoman
Empire. Jagiellonian aim was not to act directly, not to be burdened by rule over
Hungary but simultaneously to prevent negative trends there: extending zone
of instability and further Ottoman expansion, highly unfavourable for Polish
and Lithuanian domains. They accomplished this general goal. Paradoxically,
the difficult situation in the Carpathian Basin, an effect of a policy realized by
mainly dynastic means had to be solved by consciously restrained dynasticism.
The Jagiellonians used the advantages of dynastic ties, but were well aware of
their limitations. The European dynasticism met difficulties in confrontation
with the Porte. In contrary to failed Habsburg attempts to control whole
Hungary, sovereigns from Cracow and Vilnius were able to earlier realize this
limits and concentrated to save what can be saved. Nevertheless, Hungary should
not be seen solely as an 'obstacle' in the Jagiellonian policy. The engagement of
the dynasty still made it possible to save at least some chances to play a role in
the Carpathian Basin, all that in extremely unfavourable circumstances.

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34 See: Teréz Oborní and Szabolcs Varga, 'Peace as the Basis of Power in the courts of Władysław
II of Jagiellon and John I of Szapolyai', in Arno Strohmeyer and Norbert SpannEMBERGER

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**Abbreviations**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGAD. LL</td>
<td>Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie Zbiór Dokumentów pergaminowych. Libri Legationum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANF</td>
<td>Archives nationales (France), Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASF AA</td>
<td>Archivio Segreto Vaticano. Archivum Arcis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASM. A.D.S.</td>
<td>Archivio di Stato di Milano. Archivio Ducale Sforzesco</td>
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<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library, London</td>
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<td>BnF</td>
<td>BNF – Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAV</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana</td>
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<tr>
<td>CESDQ</td>
<td>Codex Epistolarii Saeculi Decimi Quinti</td>
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Documente

Documente privitoare la istoria Románilor. 1510–1530. Culese, adnotate și publicate de Nic. Densușianu. București, 1892. (Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor culese de Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, IV/3.)

DF

Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény

DL

Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Diplomatikai Levéltár

DRTA


Eubel, Hierarchia

Conrad Eubel et al., Hierarchia catholica medii aevi, sive Summorum Pontificum, S. R. E. cardinalium, ecclesiarum antiquitatum series ab anno 1198 usque ad annum perducta e documenta tabularii praeisertim Vaticani collecta, digesta, I-III. Monasterii 1913-23

Fejér, CD

Codex Diplomaticus Hungariae Ecclesiastici ac Civilis, ed. Georgius Fejér. I-XI Buda 1828-1844

Helytartói oklt.


HHStA

Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs, Wien

Index


Itineraria

Katona, Historia critica

MDE

Mon.Vat.
Relationes oratorum pontificiorum. Magyarországi pápai követek jelentései 1524–1526. (Monumenta Vaticana Hungariae historiam regni Hungariae illustrantia. Vatikáni Magyar Okirattár, Series 2, t. 1.) (Budapest 1884 [2001])

MNL OL
Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár

OBA
Ordensbriefarchiv, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

MTT
Magyar Történelmi Tár

Óváry I.

RI
RGS
**Rerum Germanicarum Scriptores**

**Rymer, Foedera**

**TNA/PRO**
Public Record Office / The National Archives, Kew, Surrey, England

**Sanuto**

**Simonyi, Okmánytár**

**Sigismundus**

**SZ**
Századok

**Theiner, VMHH**

**Theiner, Vetera monumenta Slavorum**

TSZ

*Történelmi Szemle*

ZsO