

SI ITALIE CREVERIT PUER ILLE, ERIT SULCIMENTUM ET PATRONUM TOTIUS FAMILIE MEE ***THE LETTERS OF FERENC VÁRDAI, A HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT AROUND*** ***1500***

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Abstract The paper analyzes the missives sent home by Ferenc Várdai, who studied in Padua and Bologna between 1500 and 1504 and later became bishop of Transilvania. This inquiry provides some data about the flow of information in that period and shows the strategies which the Várdai family employed in order to improve its social status. Studying in a university was seen more as a middle to acquire power and relationships, rather than knowledge. The construction of a wide relationship network home and abroad was important in order to obtain major ecclesiastical benefices, for the prestige and enrichment of the family.

Keywords Missive, university, flow of information, relationship network, ecclesiastical benefice, family solidarity.

For more than a century, letters written by students are used by scholars to shed light upon various aspects regarding studies and everyday life in medieval universities¹. Although numerous students from the Kingdom of Hungary attended Western and Central-European universities during the Middle Ages², the survival of their letters is a rather rare phenomenon.

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¹ Charles S. Haskins, "The Life of Medieval Students as Illustrated by their Letters", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1898), 203-229.

² V. Endre Veres, *Olasz egyetemeken járt magyarországi tanulók anyakönyve és iratai* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1941); Anna Tüskés, *Magyarországi diákok a bécsi egyetemen 1365-1526. Students from Hungary at the University of Vienna 1365-1526* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Levéltár, 2008); Péter Haraszti-Szabó, Borbála Kelényi, László Szögi, *Magyarországi diákok a prágai és krakkói egyetemeken 1348-1525. Students from Hungary at the Universities of Prague and Krakow 1348-1525*, vol. I-II (Budapest: MTA ELTE Egyetemtörténeti Kutatócsoport, 2016-2017); Péter

These writings had no juridical value and could contain secret information, so the recipients had at least two reasons not to keep them for a long time.

However, the archive of the Várdai family keeps a relatively large number of missives written by two clerics of the family, István and Ferenc, who studied in Italy in the middle of the 15th century and at the turning of the 15th and 16th centuries, respectively. The Várdai family archive was inherited by the Zichys in the Early Modern Age. These documents are currently preserved in the National Archives of Hungary³.

The letters of István Várdai were already published by Pál Lukcsics and analyzed by Ilona Kristóf⁴. The other ones, ten missives written by Ferenc Várdai between 1500 and 1505 from Padua, Bologna and Venice, although not fully unknown to former scholars, were neither edited nor systematically analyzed before. Pál Lukcsics, who published many documents of the Zichy archives⁵, also edited a fragment which he considered to be relevant for the history of Hungarian literature⁶. He also used the letters of Ferenc Várdai to determine some details of his biography⁷. In his book dedicated to Hungarian students in Italian universities, András Veres cited the data of Lukcsics⁸, to which he added further information from one missive which was already used and cited by his predecessor⁹. The paper of István Néző dedicated to Ferenc Várdai's cultural activity mentions the letters, confining itself to the citation of data analyzed by Lukcsics and Veres¹⁰. The recent monography of Péter Haraszi Szabó and Borbála Kelényi regarding students from Hungary attending Western-European Universities, also cites a few of these missives¹¹.

The information drawn from these sources can clarify a few aspects of Ferenc Várdai's biography, such as his discourse about family, the construction of his social network and administration of his ecclesiastical revenues. The letters also represent an interesting case

Haraszi-Szabó, Borbála Kelényi, *Magyarországi diákok francia, angol, itáliai és német egyetemeken a középkorban 1100-1526. Students from Hungary at the Universities of France, England, Italy and Germany in the Middle Ages 1100-1526* (Budapest: MTA ELTE Egyetemtörténeti Kutatócsoport, 2019).

³<https://archives.hungaricana.hu/hu/charters/search/results/?list=eyJxdWVyeSI6ICJXSkVMPShcllppY2h5I GNzYWxcdTAw ZTFkLCB6c1x1MDBlOWx5aSAoUSAYMDYpXCiPln0>, Accessed October 2019.

⁴ Pál Lukcsics, "Várdai István ferrarai diák levelei (1448-1449)", *Történeti szemle*, 14, 1929, 124-136; Ilona Kristóf, "Vester Stephanus de Warda scholaris iuris canonici. Várdai István egyetemi évei Itáliában", *Acta Academiae Paedagogicae Agriensis. Sectio Historiae*, 36 (2007), 65-82.

⁵ Pál Lukcsics, ed., *A zichi és vásonkeői gróf Zichy-család idősb ágának okmánytára*, vol. XII (Budapest: s.n., 1931).

⁶ Lukcsics, Pál, "A XVI. századi magyar irodalomtörténeti vonatkozású újabb levelek a zsélyi levéltárból", *Irodalomtörténeti közlemények*, 40, no. 2 (1930), 222.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁸ Veres, op. cit, 173-174.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰ István Néző, "Egy humanista főpap. Várdai Ferenc élete és tevékenysége", *A Nyíregyházi Jósza András Múzeum évkönyve*, 51 (2009), 233-234.

¹¹ Péter Haraszi Szabó, Borbála Kelényi, *Magyarországi diákok francia, angol, olasz és német egyetemeken*, p. 255, no. 578.

study regarding the information flow between Italy and Hungary at the turning of the 15th and 16th centuries. A source edition could not be realized here because of space limitations, but it is also an important task to be done in the future.

A research of the texts mentioned above has its obvious limits. In the first place, not all the letters survived until present: none of the missives written by Várdai the father were kept, also the letters of the son mention further documents addressed to his father or other recipients¹² that are also lost for good. A significant part of the preserved texts answer to previous letters¹³ and cannot be fully understood in the absence of those lost sources. Also, it must be added that the envoy who brought the letters had extra information about a wide range of matters, which were to be discussed orally with the recipient¹⁴. Another problem is the chronology of the documents, as some of the missives lack a precise dating¹⁵.

The recipient of all the letters was Miklós Várdai, count of Szabolcs between 1484 and 1485. He became later also count of Szabolcs (1502-1504) and of Bodrog (1507-1513)¹⁶. The members of the family held the count's office of Szabolcs and Bereg for the most of the Jagellonian period (1490-1526)¹⁷, due to the estates of Kisvárd and Bátmonostor, respectively, which comprised a major part of the two counties.

The issuer is Ferenc Várdai, who studied law at the University of Padova between 1500 and 1503 and in Bologna from 1503 to 1504¹⁸. It is generally accepted that Ferenc Várdai was already an adult, probably around forty years old, when he started his studies¹⁹. He was a member of an illustrious Hungarian noble family, his relatives held various high offices, the best known of them, István, was archbishop of Kalocsa between 1456 and 1471²⁰. Such an illustrious origin favoured the ecclesiastical career of Ferenc Várdai: in 1495 he became abbot of Dombó, three years later he obtained the archdeaconry of Komárom and a canonry in the cathedral chapter of Esztergom, shortly before his departure to Italy he was appointed as treasurer of the Székesfehérvár chapter. After coming back to Hungary, Várdai became a royal secretary, then bishop of Vác and royal treasurer; in 1513 he obtained the episcopal see of

¹² Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (National Archives of Hungary), Diplomatikai Levéltár (Diplomatic Archive, DL) 82195, 82934.

¹³ DL 82163, 82178, 82934, 82195, 82199.

¹⁴ DL 82171, 82934, 82196, 82207.

¹⁵ DL 82163, 82934.

¹⁶ Norbert C. Tóth et alii, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1458-1526* (Budapest: MTA BTK Történettudományi Intézet, 2016), vol. II, *Megyéék*, 78-79, 247.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79, 247-248.

¹⁸ Veres, op. cit., 68, 173-174; Péter Haraszti Szabó, Borbála Kelényi, *Magyarországi diákok francia, angol, olasz és német egyetemeken*, p. 255, no. 578;

¹⁹ Gedeon Borsa, "Bornemissza Pál megemlékezése Várdai Ferencről és a többi, Mohács előtti bolognai magyar vonatkozású nyomtatvány", *Irodalomtörténeti közlemények*, 87, no. 1-3 (1983), p. 48-58. http://mek.niif.hu/03300/03301/html/bgkvti_2/bgki0255.htm, Accessed October 2019.

²⁰ Ilona Kristóf, op. cit., 65-76.

Transylvania²¹. As a bishop of Transylvania, Várdai is well-known especially for his major role in defeating the peasant crusaders led by György Dózsa in 1514²² and for his patronage of Renaissance art and Humanist writers²³.

The missives were issued as closed letters (*litterae clausae*) and sealed with Ferenc Várdai's personal seal, used until his appointment as bishop of Vác. The seal matrix is a reused roman gem, dating probably from the first century AD, which was described by Tamás Gesztelyi and György Rácz: it depicts "a muse in lateral view, with her right leg on a rock or a *scrinium*; the naked superior part of her body is bent down, while her legs are covered by a horizontally folded cloak. She is holding a *pedum* in her left hand and a mask in the right"²⁴. According to the typology of the representation, it is probable to be a depiction of Thalia, the muse of comedy, or a Maenas, follower of the ancient Greek god Dionysus²⁵. All the letters were written with the same humanist cursive, probably by Ferenc Várdai himself.

The interval between two letters varies between two days and six months. The frequency of writing was probably determined by the urgency of the issues they treated and by the possibility to find someone trustworthy enough to carry the missives home and able to keep the secret of correspondence. The sources often mention the importance of this aspect. One time, the recipient found out that although his son wrote earlier, the letter might be lost from the fault of humans²⁶, later Ferenc Várdai asked his father to send his response with a specific servant²⁷, in another missive he apologized that he has not found earlier an illiterate man to carry his writing²⁸. In a research regarding information flow and its difficulties, it is less important if Ferenc Várdai wrote the truth or not. It is enough to know that the danger of loss or violation of correspondence was plausible and could seriously damage the communication between Italy and Hungary.

The letters also name some of the envoys who transported the correspondence. The first of them was a priest called Dénes²⁹, who probably assumed this task at least one more time in the following years. The second one, a certain Balázs, faithful servant (*fidelis noster*) of

²¹ Norbert C. Tóth, "Várdai Ferenc pályája az erdélyi püspöki szék elfoglalásáig", *Erdélyi Múzeum*, 78, no. 1 (2016), p. 13-25.

²² Tibor Neumann, "Bulgária-Erdély-Temesvár. Szapolyai János és a parasztháború", in *Keresztesekből lázadók. Tanulmányok 1514 Magyarországról*, ed. Norbert C. Tóth, Tibor Neumann (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 2015), 103-154.

²³ Jolán Balogh, *Az erdélyi renaissance*, (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Tudományos Intézet, 1932), vol. I, 50-52, 65-66, 150, 573-574.

²⁴ Tamás Gesztelyi, György Rácz, *Antik gemmapecsétek a középkori Magyarországon. Antike Gemmensiegel im mittelalterlichen Ungarn* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2006), 106-107.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

²⁶ DL 82195.

²⁷ DL 82196.

²⁸ DL 82199.

²⁹ DL 82171.

Ferenc Várdai, carried a single letter in 1500³⁰. The first letter, carried by Dénes, mentions an earlier writing sent home with Imre Borber³¹. *Bartholomeus litteratus* proved to be less trustworthy: he was dismissed by the younger Várdai due to lack of respect³², probably because of spreading gossips which affected the relationship between father and son³³. He was replaced by another servant, Ferenc, who went to Hungary with a letter in 1501³⁴, being probably the same as Ferenc Tárnoki, who was called back by his master a few months later³⁵. In 1502 at least four letters were carried home at once by a certain Mihály, fellow canon of the issuer in the chapter of Székesfehérvár³⁶. In January 1503, Dénes was the one who carried two letters to Hungary³⁷. In the summer of the same year, Várdai the son asked his father to send back Dénes³⁸. The next letter, written two months later, was sent with Mihály, probably the same as before, who became in the meantime treasurer of the Kalocsa cathedral chapter³⁹.

The letters also keep some information regarding payments made to the envoys. The above-mentioned Ferenc was rewarded for his efforts with a barrel of wine (*unum vas vini*)⁴⁰. Another envoy, Mihály, spent 1 ducat and 90 denarii of his own to solve some business of Ferenc Várdai in Venice, thus the student asked his father to return him the money⁴¹. When he requested from his father to send back Dénes to him, Ferenc Várdai also asked a good horse and adequate equipment for his servant⁴².

The missives of Ferenc Várdai address four major topics: (1) news from Western Europe and the Mediterranean, (2) the construction of a relationship network (3) administration of ecclesiastic revenues and (4) family matters.

(1) The news sent home by Ferenc Várdai provide no new historical information. The importance of those lies in the help they offer in order to date more precisely some of the documents. These news shed light also on the speed of information at the turning of the 15th and 16th centuries.

One of the most pressing issues in Hungary at that time was the swift advance of the neighboring and hostile Turkish Empire. It is not surprising that news about the campaigns carried by the Turks against other Christian states were sent home as fast as possible. Sometime in 1500, Ferenc Várdai asked if the Hungarians are preparing to fight against the

³⁰ DL 82171.

³¹ DL 82171.

³² DL 82178.

³³ DL 82163.

³⁴ DL 82178.

³⁵ DL 82934.

³⁶ DL 82934.

³⁷ DL 82195, 82196.

³⁸ DL 82199.

³⁹ DL 82201.

⁴⁰ DL 82178.

⁴¹ DL 82201.

⁴² DL 82191.

Turks adding that their enemies have captured the strong fortress of Modon (Methoni, in Peloponessos), previously held by Venice⁴³. The dating of this letter mentions only the year. Knowing that the fall of Methoni took place on the 9th of August⁴⁴, it can be stated that this letter was written some time after that date. With the help of this information, it becomes possible to place the document in the chronology of the whole correspondence.

The Hungarian student added that *spes nulla in mundo ipsis Venetiis preter hungaros, quia ab Hungaria habent totam spem et vitam*⁴⁵. It is tempting to reconsider the importance given to the Hungarian military force by the contemporaries based on this sentence, but one should not forget that the information went through two rhetorical filters: in the first place, Várdai's Venetian acquaintances might have overestimated on purpose their consideration for their interlocutor's homeland; and secondly, the addressee of the letter was a nobleman, member of a social group for which military achievement was an important component of self-presentation, thus an exaggeration of Hungary's military potential could be a useful stylistic tool. However, recent scholarship has demonstrated that the army of the Hungarian kingdom was a fairly strong military force even during the crisis of the 1520s⁴⁶, so one cannot exclude the hypothesis that around 1500 at least a part of the Venetian public opinion really counted on Hungary to contain the Ottoman expansion.

On the 10th of April 1501, Ferenc Várdai announced his father that the king of Hungary, Vladislaus II, obtained what he wanted at the Roman Curia⁴⁷. Although the letter does not provide further details, it must be assumed that the issue was related to the marriage of the Hungarian king to Anne de Foix, niece of Louis XII, king of France. In order to obtain the Hungarian throne, Vladislaus has secretly married Beatrix of Aragon, the widow of his predecessor, king Matthias Corvinus, but later refused to recognize the validity of this marriage. After a long trial at the Roman Curia, which implied diplomatic activity of various European courts, on the 3rd of April 1500, Pope Alexander VI declared the invalidity of the marriage between Vladislaus and Beatrix⁴⁸. It is sure that Várdai's missive does not refer to that decision. It is impossible to assume that news about such an important fact might have arrived to Padua only a year later. Unfortunately, the events between the end of 1500 and the arrival of Anne de Foix to Hungary are still mostly unknown. It is not impossible that in the first days of April 1501 the pope would have given the permission for the marriage contracted through emissaries in the context of negotiations regarding a large scale anti-Ottoman alliance. A definitive answer to this question is still to be researched in the Vatican archives.

⁴³ DL 82171.

⁴⁴ <https://www.kastra.eu/castleen.php?kastro=methoni>, Accessed October 2019.

⁴⁵ DL 82171.

⁴⁶ András Kubinyi, "A mohácsi csata és előzményei", *Századok*, 115, no. 1 (1981), 85, 93-94.

⁴⁷ DL 82175.

⁴⁸ Gusztáv Wenzel, "II. Ulászló magyar és cseh király házassága 1501-1506", *Századok*, 11 (1877), 630-641; Attila Györkös, "II. Ulászló házassága és a francia diplomácia", *Acta Academiae Agriensis, Sectio Historiae*, 39 (2012), 89-102.

Várdai wrote also about rumors regarding the death of Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, who cardinal was holding various ecclesiastic revenues, among others the ones from Hungarian abbeys of Pécsvárad and Szekszárd⁴⁹, so the swift arrival of the information about his possible death could be very important in order to obtain at least one of the two benefices. In fact, the cardinal was made a prisoner in a battle against France in 1500, being released only in the next year. He died a few years later, in 1505⁵⁰, so Várdai could obtain neither of the two abbeys.

(2) It seems that one of Ferenc Várdai's major objectives was to acquire further ecclesiastic benefices. In order to achieve that goal, it was very important to find out as soon as possible about the vacancy of these ecclesiastic dignities, but that was by far not enough. Constructing an extended relationship network which could sustain his career advancement was also crucial.

On the 10th of April 1501, Ferenc Várdai asked his father to recommend him for the service of Péter Váradi, archbishop of Kalocsa, adding that Váradi's benevolence towards their family was well-known. The issuer had written also a laudative message for archbishop Váradi, *cuius etiam fama propter singularem doctrinam ac ingenii elegantiam eloquentieque omnipotentem vim nedum totam Italiam invasit, sed etiam omnes alias orbis partes ad quas latina litteratura pervenitur*⁵¹. However, the archbishop of Kalocsa died on the same day⁵², so the student of Padova could not take any profit from this relationship.

Only a month later, Ferenc Várdai sent to Hungary a few little gifts destined to the king Vladislaus II and requested to be recommended to the monarch, for the profit of the entire family⁵³. His gesture is understandable, given the fact that kings of Hungary assumed the right of patronage and thus controlled the designation for all the major ecclesiastic benefices of the country⁵⁴. It seems that the efforts done to impress the king had a good result, although not immediately: in 1504, in his last known letter from Italy, Ferenc Várdai expressed his hope to be chosen for some service and his will to come home if he would really obtained that service. He showed his gratitude for the almost certain nomination, adding that *sciam utpote qui litteratis et idiotis se prestare solet*⁵⁵. The letter does not mention the service for which Várdai was to be nominated. Although his first mention as a secretary of the king dates only

⁴⁹ DL 82171.

⁵⁰ <http://webdept.fiu.edu/~mirandas/bios1484.htm#Sforza>, Accessed October 2019.

⁵¹ DL 82175; Pál Lukcsics, *A XVI. századi magyar irodalomtörténeti vonatkozású újabb levelek a zsélyi levéltárból*, 221.

⁵² Norbert C. Tóth, *Magyarország késő-középkori főpapi archontológiája (1458–1526)* (Győr: Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2017), 20.

⁵³ DL 82178.

⁵⁴ Vilmos Fraknoi, *A magyar királyi kegyuri jog szent Istvántól Mária Teréziáig. Történeti tanulmány* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1895); Péter Tusor, "A konstanzi bulla „alkalmazása”. A magyar királyi főkegyuri jog a 15–16. században", in *Causa unionis, causa fidei, causa reformationis in capite et membris: Tanulmányok a konstanzi zsinat 600. évfordulója alkalmából*, ed. Attila Bárany, László Pósnán (Debrecen: Printart-press Kft., 2014), 219–240.

⁵⁵ DL 82207.

from 1507⁵⁶, it is possible that he was appointed earlier, knowing that as early as the 14th of May 1505 he was already in Hungary⁵⁷, as he promised in his previous letter. His next document was issued from Buda on the 5th of May 1506⁵⁸, this also seems to indicate that Várdai became a secretary earlier than 1507, possibly not much after arriving home from Italy. As we saw above, Ferenc Várdai kept his good connection to the king's court, as he later became bishop of Vác and then of Transylvania, one of the richest dioceses in Hungary.

In 1502 Várdai asked his father to dispatch a few minor gifts (*minuscula*) and letters, this time to three prelates: Tamás Bakóc, cardinal and archbishop of Esztergom, Zsigmond Eruszt, bishop of Pécs, and György Szatmári, bishop of Oradea (Nagyvárad, Großwardein). In a *post scriptum*, the younger Várdai gives some detailed instructions regarding the gifts: two money bags, probably of different shapes (*crumenam et bursam*) were to be given to the bishop of Pécs, a black liturgical belt (*cingulum*) was destined to the archbishop of Esztergom, while the bishop of Oradea got another liturgical belt and a comb⁵⁹. In the first month of the following year the student of Padova asked again his father to recommend him to Zsigmond Eruszt⁶⁰.

All the relationships with the above-mentioned prelates continued and developed in the following years. Eruszt advised Várdai the younger to move to Rome⁶¹. The latest biographer of Ferenc Várdai assumes that he followed the advice. Anyway, the only evidence suggesting that he might have been there in an epitaph written by Achille Bocchi, according to which *Latío egit primis feliciter annos*⁶². In the current state of the research it is impossible to tell anything about his itinerary between the 20th of April 1504 and the 14th of May 1505, so it could be assumed that he really was in Rome for a few months. The bishop of Pécs died in 1505⁶³, so he could not help further the career development of his protégé.

György Szatmári, who became in the following years bishop of Eger and then archbishop of Esztergom was the closest protector of Ferenc Várdai among all the Hungarian prelates. It is highly probable that Szatmári had a decisive influence over Várdai's career development, as Tibor Neumann argued in a recent paper⁶⁴. As late as 1513, in a letter written to one of his servants, Várdai referred to Szatmári as *dominus meus*⁶⁵. In 1519 Szatmári was a

⁵⁶ DL 21717.

⁵⁷ DL 82225.

⁵⁸ DL 82246.

⁵⁹ DL 82934.

⁶⁰ DL 82195.

⁶¹ DL 82199.

⁶² Néző, op. cit., p. 234; Gedeon Borsa, op. cit., <http://mek.niif.hu/03300/03301/html/bgkvti2/bgki0255.htm>, Accessed October 2019.

⁶³ Norbert C. Tóth, *Magyarország késő-középkori főpapi archontológiája*, 50.

⁶⁴ Neumann, op. cit., p. 108.

⁶⁵ DF 271586.

member of a political alliance which also included Várdai⁶⁶ and he helped János, Ferenc Várdai's younger brother to gain the office of *decemvir* in the town of Pécs⁶⁷.

The relationship with Bakóc did not lack episodes of conflict, but it was generally harmonic. In 1513 the cardinal refused to propose the confirmation of Ferenc Várdai as bishop of Transylvania, due to a juridical issue which was not solved at that moment⁶⁸. However, in the following year, Bakóc, who became in the meantime a papal legate with the assignment of organizing an anti-Ottoman crusade, appointed Várdai as his vice-legate for Transylvania⁶⁹. As a bishop of Transylvania, Várdai corresponded with Bakóc⁷⁰ and appointed one of his nephews as canon of the cathedral chapter in Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár, Weißenburg)⁷¹.

In his last missive sent from Bologna, Ferenc Várdai announced his father that Dénes, the dispatcher of the letter, received indication regarding some silver cups (*pocula argentea*)⁷². It is possible that these cups were also gifted to someone in order to extend the relationship network, but unfortunately the document provides no further information.

The sources show no direct evidence of their issuer's relationship network in Italy. However the news from Rome and Venice suggest that the Ferenc Várdai had some connections to these cities. As I have written above, Várdai's stay in Rome is not beyond all doubt. On the other hand, one of the letters was issued in Venice, so Várdai the son travelled there at least once during the period of his studies⁷³.

(3) A further topic of the letters is the administration of ecclesiastical benefices. The details of the administration are very hard to understand, as most of the letters refer generally to issues related to the revenues from Esztergom or Székesfehérvár, adding usually that further information will be provided and requested by the envoy who carries the letter⁷⁴.

Miklós Várdai administrated his son's revenues⁷⁵. It seems that money became at certain times source of conflict between them. The dismissal of the envoy-servant *Bartholomeus litteratus* is probably related with the fact that he did let the older Várdai know

⁶⁶ DL 23150, edited by Dezső Szabó, p. 147-149.

⁶⁷ DL 89053.

⁶⁸ DL 82382.

⁶⁹ Gábor Barta, Antal Fekete Nagy, *Parasztháború 1514-ben* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1973), 189; Tibor Neumann, *Bulgária, Erdély, Temesvár. Szapolyai János és a parasztháború*, in Idem, Norbert C. Tóth, *Keresztesekekből lázadók. Tanulmányok 1514 Magyarországról*, p. 106-110.

⁷⁰ V. DF 249065.

⁷¹ János Erdődi was appointed as canon between 1513 and 1519: v. Vekov, anexa 1513 and 1519; for the kinship connection between Bakóc and Erdődi, v. Iván Nagy, *Magyarország családai*, vol. IV, <https://www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Nagyivan-nagy-ivan-magyarorszag-csaladai-1/negyedik-kotet-233E/erdody-csalad-monyoro-kereki-grof-25AE/>, Accessed September 2019.

⁷² DL 82207.

⁷³ DL 82201.

⁷⁴ DL 82196, 82199.

⁷⁵ DL 82163, 82199.

that his son would not like to entrust him the administration of those revenues⁷⁶. Ferenc Várdai asked his father regularly for money⁷⁷, as in the fall of 1500, when he requested all his yearly income from Eszergom⁷⁸. He also complained because his father did not send enough money⁷⁹ or did not send at all⁸⁰. The seed of conflict did not totally disappear until 1503, as one can see from the next letters of the younger Várdai: at first, he expressed his worries about the rare and short letters of his father⁸¹, later he considered that nothing of his previous letter should have affected his parent and advised him not to listen to the gossips⁸².

(4) While facilitating his own career development, Ferenc Várdai also thought about increasing the status of his family. In his vision, studying abroad would be a good start for a prodigious career. That's why he asked Miklós Várdai to send one more of his sons, János, to Italy. His argument was that the whole family will profit of one more educated member: *serio hoc dico: si Italie creverit puer ille, erit sulcimentum et patronum totius familie mee*⁸³.

Personal or family issues which had to be solved at home or abroad by one of the correspondents were also treated rather parcimoniously in written documents. Apart from the two concrete issues presented above, the letters offer mostly rhetorical assertions, such as the importance of love and respect given to the father⁸⁴, apologies for not writing earlier⁸⁵, the hard work done by Ferenc for the whole family's sake⁸⁶.

The observation made by Endre Veres about one of Várdai's letters from Italy stands for the whole *corpus* analyzed above: the student of Padova and Bologna did not write any single word about his studies or everyday life at the university⁸⁷. Unlike István, the other illustrious cleric of the family⁸⁸, Ferenc did not acquire any university degree. One possible explanation could be that, so as many of the Hungarian students from various universities, Ferenc Várdai was not particularly interested in studying or obtaining a degree, but rather in acquiring some minimal competence and building an extended relationship network in order to develop his career⁸⁹.

⁷⁶ DL 82163.

⁷⁷ DL 82171, 82934, 82195.

⁷⁸ DL 82171.

⁷⁹ DL 82934.

⁸⁰ DL 82195.

⁸¹ DL 82178.

⁸² DL 82934.

⁸³ DL 82934.

⁸⁴ DL 82163.

⁸⁵ DL 82195.

⁸⁶ DL 82934.

⁸⁷ Endre Veres, op. cit., 68.

⁸⁸ Ilona Kristóf, op. cit., 79.

⁸⁹ Sándor Tonk, *Erdélyiek egyetemjárása a középkorban* (Budapest: Kriterion könyvkiadó, 1979), 103-104, 169-170.

During his studies in Padova and Bologna, Várdai was in contact with the king himself and with the most influent prelates of Hungary: the two archbishops and the bishops of Pécs and Oradea. Ferenc Várdai profited during his entire later career from the relationships he had built during his studies.

Although the documents do not provide much direct information about the concrete studies of their issuer, one can observe that the encounter with Humanist culture enabled him to write easily in a refined Latin style and also to become later one of the most important patrons of arts and letters in Late Medieval Transylvania.

I think the sentence cited in the title comprises the main purpose of Ferenc Várdai's stay in Italy. In the discourse of the issuer, studying, developing a relationship network and thus acquiring benefices was important in order to increase the power, wealth and prestige of his family. The ecclesiastic incomes held already were administrated by the head of the family and invested in the studies of Ferenc and in protocol gifts sent home, for the sake of all the Várdais. Ilona Kristóf was probably right when she wrote about a conscious politics of the Várdai family in order to make possible its social mobility through university studies⁹⁰. A student's residence in Italy was useful to his family, not only because of his career perspectives, but also for acquiring as quickly as possible some useful information about vacant church benefices or the external affairs of the Hungarian kingdom. The family played an important role also during the later activity of Ferenc Várdai. From 1509, when his father died, he became the head of the family and made considerable efforts in order to assure that his younger brothers, Mihály, János, Imre and Ambrus will study in universities⁹¹, construct illustrious careers⁹² and – last but not least – improve the status of the entire family.

Chronological list of missives

1. 1500, March 20, Padua (DL 82163)
2. 1500, after August 9, Padua (DL 82171)
3. 1501, April 10, Padua (DL 82175)
4. 1501, May 26, Padua (DL 82178)
5. 1502, Padua (DL 82934)
6. 1503, January 19, Padua (DL 82195)
7. 1503, January 21, Padua (DL 82196)
8. 1503, July 24, Bologna (DL 82199)
9. 1503, September 3, Venice (DL 82201)
10. 1504, April 20, Bologna (DL 82207)

⁹⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁹¹ Péter Haraszti-Szabó, Borbála Kelényi, László Szögi, *Magyarországi diákok a prágai és krakkói egyetemeken 1348-1525*, p. 423, no. 4232; lidem, *Magyarországi diákok francia, angol, olasz és német egyetemeken*, p. 169-170, no. 312; p. 184-185, no. 341;

⁹² DL 89053, 89076, 82515, 82477, 82635.