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## Stephen Bocskai's Early Relations with Poland (1583–1594)<sup>1</sup>

Wczesne relacje Stefana Bocskaja z Polską (1583–1594)

### Abstract

Stephen Bocskai (1557–1606), Prince of Transylvania, had a social network of Polish relations spanning decades, which was particularly extensive during the period of the revolt (1604–1606). In this study, I focus on the early phase of this extensive social network, up to 1594. These relations can be demonstrated from 1583, and their development is closely linked to his kinship with the Báthory family, the ruling family of Transylvania. After the marriage of Bocskai's niece, Christina Báthory, to the Polish chancellor and great hetman Jan Zamoyski, Bocskai himself became related to and began corresponding with a leading figure in Polish

1 This article has been written within the framework of the HUN-REN-SZTE Research Group of the Ottoman Age, and the University of Szeged Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Department of Medieval and Early Modern Hungarian History. I would like to express my gratitude to Sándor László Tóth for the valuable assistance provided during the writing of this paper. Part of this study has been published in Hungarian: Krisztina Juhász, “...színe élé tárom, így, mint fiú az atyjának... Bocskai István és Jan Zamoyski kapcsolata”, in *Sípos József Emlékkötet*, eds. Ágnes Deák, Krisztina Juhász and Gellért Ernő Marton (Szeged: SZTE BTK Középkori és Kora Újkori Magyar Történeti Tanszék, 2023), 125–135.

political life. Stephen Bocskai's diplomatic missions to Poland in 1588 and 1590, which also involved the Báthory family and its affairs, helped him to personally strengthen and expand his Polish relations with Zamoyski and others. In my study, I use two instructions and other relevant sources to reconstruct the purposes and circumstances of these journeys, as well as Bocskai's role and activities. For my research, in addition to using the relevant literature and source publications, I collected unpublished sources from the Cathedral Library of Esztergom, the Manuscript Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the National Archives of Hungary.

**Keywords:** Stephen Bocskai, Polish–Transylvanian relations, Jan Zamoyski, Báthory family, diplomatic missions (1588–1590).

## Abstrakt

Stefan Bocskai (1557–1606), książę Siedmiogrodu, posiadał rozległą sieć kontaktów polskich, rozwijającą się przez dziesięciolecia, a szczególnie intensywną w okresie powstania (1604–1606). W niniejszym artykule koncentruję się na wczesnym etapie tej sieci, do roku 1594. Relacje te można poświadczyc od 1583 roku, a ich rozwój pozostaje ściśle związany z pokrewieństwem Bocskaja z rodem Batorych, panującym w Siedmiogrodzie. Po ślubie siostrzenicy Bocskaja, Krystyny Batory, z kanclerzem wielkim koronnym i hetmanem wielkim koronnym Janem Zamoyskim, również sam Bocskai stał się spowinowacony z czołową postacią polskiego życia politycznego i rozpoczął z nim korespondencję. Dyplomatyczne misje Stefana Bocskaja do Polski w latach 1588 i 1590, które również dotyczyły spraw rodu Batorych, pozwoliły mu osobiste wzmacnić i poszerzyć sieć polskich kontaktów, obejmującą Zamoyskiego i inne osoby. W swoim studium wykorzystuję dwie instrukcje oraz inne istotne źródła, aby odtworzyć cele i okoliczności tych podróży, a także rolę i działania Bocskaja. Do badań, oprócz wykorzystania odpowiedniej literatury i publikowanych źródeł, zebrałem także materiały nieopublikowane z Biblioteki Katedralnej w Ostrzyhomiu, Archiwum Rękopisów Węgierskiej Akademii Nauk oraz Archiwów Narodowych Węgier.

**Słowa klucze:** Stefan Bocskai, stosunki polsko-siedmiogrodzkie, Jan Zamoyski, ród Batorych, misje dyplomatyczne (1588–1590).

In one of his letters written in 1605, Stephen Bocskai (Hungarian: István Bocskai) referred to “a magyar nemzetnek a lengyel respublika iránti jószomszédi barátsága” (“the good-neighbourly friendship of the Hungarian nation towards the Polish Republic”), invoking the long-standing historical bonds and friendship between the two peoples. The roots of Hungarian–Polish relations go back to the Middle Ages, and

the history of the two countries and their peoples has been marked by countless economic, political, military, diplomatic, dynastic, cultural and other interactions and cooperation over the past centuries. In my paper, I highlight a period from this long-term, diverse relationship, focusing on the early modern period, and more specifically, the last decades of the sixteenth century. My study focuses on one of the most influential figures in early modern Hungarian history, Stephen Bocskai (1557–1606), Prince of Transylvania, and concentrates on the early phase of his decades-long Polish relations. One of its focal points is the presentation of the relationship between Bocskai and his contemporary, the Polish-born Chancellor Jan Zamoyski (1542–1605) between 1583 and 1594. My attention was drawn to this topic by the exploration and analysis of Bocskai's correspondence and the social network that emerged from it.<sup>2</sup>

## Stephen Bocskai and Jan Zamoyski – the beginning of a kinship

First of all, it is worth briefly outlining the early adulthood and family relationships of the leader of the diverse and multipurpose revolt associated with Stephen Bocskai,<sup>3</sup> which broke out in the last years of the so-called Fifteen Years' War or Long Turkish War (1591/1593–1606), as this will make it clear what the circumstances were that contributed to the development of his Polish relations. Stephen Bocskai was born on 1 January 1557, in Kolozsvár, in the territory of the Principality of Transylvania, to George Bocskai (in Hungarian: György Bocskai) and Christina Sulyok (in Hungarian: Krisztina Sulyok).<sup>4</sup> Through his parents, he was

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2 This is the subject of my doctoral thesis, which is currently in preparation, on the examination of the correspondence and social network of Stephen Bocskai (1557–1606).

3 For a summary of the complexity of the Bocskai revolt and the definitions of the various names, with further references to specialist literature, see: Géza Pálffy, *A Magyar Királyság és a Habsburg Monarchia a 16. században* (Budapest: História – MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2011), 364–386, especially: 364–380. The history of the revolt more recently: Sándor Papp, *Török szövetség – Habsburg kiegyezés. A Bocskai-felkelés történetéhez* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2014).

4 Monographs on the life of Stephen Bocskai: Kálmán Benda, *Bocskai István (1557–1606)* (n. p.: Franklin Társulat, n. d.); Kálmán Benda, *Bocskai István* (Budapest: Századvég, 1993); András Szabó, "Téged Isten dicsérünk." *Bocskai István, Erdély és Magyarország fejedelem* (Budapest: A Magyar Reformatúr Egyház Kálvin János Kiadója, 2006); László Nagy, *Egy szablyás magyar úr Genfben. A sokarcú Bocskai István* (Hajdúböszörmény: Hajdúsági Múzeum – Polgármesteri Hivatal, 2000); Nóra G. Etényi, Ildikó Horn and Péter Szabó, *Koronás fejedelem. Bocskai István és kora* (Budapest: General Press Kiadó, 2006).

the scion of a military and politically experienced family, whose members included, among others, the prominent figure of Hungarian literature, the poet Valentine Balassi (in Hungarian: Bálint Balassi, 1554–1594) and the heroic defender of Eger Castle in 1552, Stephen Dobó (in Hungarian: István Dobó) (c. 1505–1572).<sup>5</sup> Between 1567 and 1576, he was raised at the courts of Vienna and Prague under Maximilian II (1527–1576), Holy Roman Emperor (1564–1576), King of Bohemia (1562–1576) and King of Hungary (1564–1576), and served, initially as a page, then as a nobleman serving with one and later two horses, and finally as a royal attendant. It was then that the young Bocskai mastered the noble codes of conduct, learned foreign languages, and acquired political and military knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

Bocskai returned to Transylvania in the very year (1576) when Stephen Báthory of Somlyó (in Hungarian: István Báthory) (1533–1586) left for Poland. After his coronation as King of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania and Prince of Transylvania (1576–1586), the Principality was governed in his absence by his elder brother, Christopher Báthory (in Hungarian: Kristóf Báthory) (1530–1581), as voivode of Transylvania and count of the Székelys (in Hungarian *a székelyek ispánja*, in Latin *comes Siculorum*).<sup>7</sup> After his return home, Bocskai was aided in his advancement by the Báthory family and by his kinship with them. The two families became related through Bocskai's sister sometime around 1567–1568, when Elizabeth Bocskai (in Hungarian: Erzsébet Bocskai) (1550–1581) married Christopher Báthory, who was then still border-fortress captain-general of Várad.<sup>8</sup> Bocskai was soon granted his majority, given the title of *magnificus*, and later promoted to the rank of princely retainer with specifically military duties in Várad.<sup>9</sup> The beginning of Stephen Bocskai's

5 Etényi et al., *Koronás fejedelem*, 22–23.

6 István Fazekas, "Négy levél Bocskai István bécsi és prágai tartózkodásához (1572, 1576)," *Lymbus. Magyarságtudományi forrásközlemények* 1 (2003): 19–20; István Fazekas, "Adalékok az ifjú Bocskai István bécsi udvarban eltöltött éveihez," *Studia Caroliensia* 6/1 (2006): 73–85.

7 Teréz Oborni, *Erdélyi országgyűlések a 16–17. században* (Budapest: Országház Könyvkiadó, 2018), 290.

8 András Szabó, "Az ismeretlen kismarjai Bocskai család," *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolciensis. Sectio Philosophica. Tanulmányok Bocskai Istvánról*. A 2006. április 22-én megrendezett konferencia előadásai 13/2 (2008): 173; Géza Pálffy, "Kerületi és végvidéki főkapitányok és főkapitány-helyettesek Magyarországon a 16–17. században. (Minta egy készülő főkapitányi archontológiai és „életrajzi lexikonból”)," *Történelmi Szemle* 39/2 (1997): 286.

9 G. Etényi et al., *Koronás fejedelem*, 61–62; Ildikó Horn, "Bocskai István a Báthoryak udvarában," *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolciensi. Sectio Philosophica. Tanulmányok Bocskai Istvánról*. A 2006. április 22-én megrendezett konferencia előadásai 13/2 (2008):

Polish relations can be dated to the early 1580s, and according to surviving sources, to 1583 at the latest, and their development also shows a connection with the kinship nexus with the Báthory family. The year 1583 was when Bocskai's niece, the daughter of the aforementioned Elizabeth Bocskai (in Hungarian: Erzsébet Bocskai) and Christopher Báthory, married Jan Zamoyski, who eventually became one of the key figures in Bocskai's Polish relations.

Jan Zamoyski is well known in Hungarian historical research; he is most frequently discussed in relation to the ruling family of the Principality of Transylvania, the Báthory family of Somlyó. He was born in Skokówka on 19 March 1542 to Stanisław Zamoyski and Anna Herburt.<sup>10</sup> His parents paid careful attention to the education of their son, who was of lower-noble descent, thanks to which the young Zamoyski studied at several high-quality educational institutions in Europe, including Paris, Strasbourg, and the universities of Krakow and Padua. At the latter institution, he not only obtained his doctorate, but also served as rector in 1563.<sup>11</sup> After returning to Poland, he entered the court of Sigismund II Augustus (1520–1572), King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania (1548–1572), where he began his career as royal secretary and later served as keeper of the royal archives.<sup>12</sup> After the death of Sigismund II Augustus in 1572, Jan Zamoyski supported the French pretender to the throne, Henry of Valois (1551–1589).<sup>13</sup>

After Henry's brief reign and departure (June 1574), there were numerous candidates for the Polish throne, ranging from the House of Habsburg and the Duke of Ferrara, to the Russian and Swedish rulers, the Elector of Brandenburg, the Piasts, and the ruler of Transylvania.<sup>14</sup> The process

48–49; *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek*, III, ed. Sándor Szilágyi (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történelmi Bizottsága, 1877), 188–189.

10 In his study, Péter Balla points out that the contemporary chancellor's secretary, Reinhold Heidensten (1553–1620), gives 1541 as the year of Jan Zamoyski's birth. Péter Balla, "Báthory István király és Jan Zamoyski kapcsolata: egy sikeres együttműködés története," *Historia nostra: történelmi folyóirat* 1/1 (2013): 8–9.

11 Norman Davies, *Lengyelország története* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2006), 132; Sándor Gebei, *Az erdélyi fejedelmek és a lengyel királyválasztások* (Szeged: Belvedere Meridionale, 2007), 383; Balla, "Báthory István király," 8; Jan Zamoyski himself devoted considerable attention to the development of Polish education in the last third of the 16th century. For more information on his endeavours, see: Endre Kovács, *A krakkói egyetem és a magyar művelődés. Adalékok a magyar–lengyel kapcsolatok XV–XVI. századi történetéhez* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1964), 174–177.

12 Davies, *Lengyelország története*, 133; Gebei, *Az erdélyi fejedelmek*, 383.

13 Balla, "Báthory István király," 9.

14 Gebei, *Az erdélyi fejedelmek*, 38–39.

of electing the Polish king – and the operation of the election Sejm that accompanied it – was complex and full of twists and turns. Zamoyski was one of those who proposed the election of Princess Anna Jagiellon<sup>15</sup> (1523–1596) as queen and her marriage to a suitable candidate. She was the fourth child of Sigismund I (1467–1548), King of Poland (1506–1548) and his wife Bona Sforza (1494–1557).<sup>16</sup> At the end of a lengthy procedure, on 14 December 1575, among the candidates for the throne, the then voivode of Transylvania, Stephen Báthory, who had become known in Polish political life through the Zborowski brothers, won the throne and with it the princess's hand.<sup>17</sup> Jan Zamoyski's relationship with Stephen Báthory can actually be traced back to this point, and was characterized by cooperation and mutual support until Báthory's death.

During the reign of Stephen Báthory, Zamoyski gradually became one of the leading politicians of his time. The Polish–Lithuanian ruler rewarded the merits, loyalty, and support of his supreme republican patron, not only with the donation of estates, but also with the conferral of offices. Thus, in 1576, he nominated him as Vice-Chancellor, in 1578, as Chancellor – replacing Piotr Dunin-Wolski, who was first appointed chancellor and later bishop of Polock – and then, in 1581, he appointed Zamoyski as Great Hetman of the Crown, who thus held two of the most important state offices of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth simultaneously for the rest of his life.<sup>18</sup> Shortly thereafter, Jan Zamoyski and Báthory's relationship became even closer and took on a different character, as they were now linked together not only by political interests but also by dynastic ties. After the death of his second wife, Krystyna Radziwiłł,<sup>19</sup> who came from an influential magnate family, in 1582, the chancellor married the then fifteen-year-old Christina

15 For more information on the life of Anna Jagiellon, see: Ildikó Horn, *A könnyező krokodil. Jagelló Anna és Báthory István házassága* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2007), passim.

16 Gebei, *Az erdélyi fejedelmek*, 49–50.

17 For details on the circumstances surrounding Stephen Báthory's accession to the Polish throne, see: Lajos Szádeczky, *Báthory István. Báthory István lengyel királyá választása 1574–1576* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1887); Gebei, *Az erdélyi fejedelmek*, 37–59; Horn, *A könnyező krokodil*, 127–151.

18 Davies, *Lengyelország története*, 339, 341–342; Open letter of Stephen Báthory. Krakow, 16 May 1576. Endre Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár levelezése magyarokkal és magyarokról* (1576–1605), Manuscript. Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtár és Információs Központ Kézirattár és Régi Könyvek Gyűjteménye (in the following: MTA KIK KRKGY) Ms. 433. 200–201; Open letter of Stephen Báthory. Warsaw, 1 March 1578. *Ibidem*, 204.

19 The marriage between Jan Zamoyski and Krystyna Radziwiłł was encouraged and supported by Stephen Báthory himself, primarily so that he could count the Radziwiłł family among his supporters. Ildikó Horn, "Báthory István uralkodói portréja," in

Báthory (in Hungarian: Krisztina Báthory) (1569–1590), the daughter of Christopher Báthory (1530–1581), who was also the niece of Stephen Báthory. After Christina Báthory was orphaned, her maternal grandmother, Christina Sulyok, took on the responsibility of raising her for several years. The young girl was as stubborn as she was intelligent and educated: Christina, who had been raised by her mother in the Protestant faith, could not be converted to Catholicism even after lengthy attempts.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the Zamoyski–Báthory marriage took place in 1583 as between members of different denominations, after which, presumably due to the similarity of name with Zamoyski's second wife, the new bride took the name Grizeldis (in Hungarian: Grizeldisz).<sup>21</sup> The marriage not only strengthened the position of the Báthory family in Poland, but Zamoyski became an important supporter of Stephen Báthory within the family as well. Following the wedding, Stephen Bocskai, as Christina Báthory's maternal uncle, also became related to Jan Zamoyski.

Despite the fact that we do not find Stephen Bocskai in the five-hundred-strong wedding procession that left Gyulafehérvár on 3 May 1583, accompanying Christina Báthory to Krakow,<sup>22</sup> nor in the list of participants in the ceremony held in Krakow on 12 June, or in the ten-day series of grand celebrations,<sup>23</sup> it is nevertheless proven that Bocskai and Zamoyski knew each other and were in contact with each other that year. As we shall see, their communication took place not only through personal meetings and correspondence, but also occasionally through trusted people and envoys. The first known and surviving piece of their correspondence is dated 17 September 1583.<sup>24</sup> The letter is in fact a courtesy letter confirming the relationship between the two, a reply from

*Portré és imázs. Politikai propaganda és reprezentáció a kora újkorban*, eds. Nóra G. Etényi, Ildikó Horn (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2008), 372.

20 For Christina Báthory's character, see: Ildikó Horn, *Báthory András* (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2002), 52–53; For Christina Báthory's biography, see: Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 16–51. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

21 Horn, *Báthory András*, 53–55; Etényi et al., *Koronás fejedelem*, 69.

22 Stephen Bocskai's mother, Christina Sulyok, was a member of the accompaniment and one of the leaders of the female companions. Endre Veress, *Báthory István király (Terror Hostium) halálának 350-ik esztendejében* (Budapest: Magyar Mickiewicz Társaság, 1937), 212. The accompaniment was accompanied by 600 soldiers, who ensured the protection of the valuable dowry. Horn, *Báthory András*, 55.

23 A contemporary account of the events in Krakow by Heidensten Reinhold has survived; see the Latin document: Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 261–277. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433; The series of celebrations was reconstructed: Veress, *Báthory István király*, 212–222; Horn, *Báthory András*, 55–58.

24 Jan Zamoyski to Stephen Bocskai. Krakow, 17 September 1583. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltár (in the following: MNL OL) Esterházy család hercegi ágának

Zamoyski to a letter previously sent to him by Bocskai – which has not survived or has not yet been found – sent to Bocskai via John Cseffey (in Hungarian: János Cseffey),<sup>25</sup> who was leaving for the Principality of Transylvania. The Polish Chancellor not only assured Bocskai of his goodwill and friendship, but also referred to the newly established kinship between them (“novam hanc affinitatem”) in the document.<sup>26</sup> Decades later, in January 1605, Bocskai himself considered it important to mention this relationship in a letter written to justify the legitimacy of the revolt he led, and to remind Zamoyski of it.<sup>27</sup>

## Stephen Bocskai's mission to Poland in 1588

Stephen Bocskai's Polish relations were established and strengthened not only with Zamoyski, but also with others during personal meetings, which were made possible by his diplomatic missions to Poland. It seems that he visited Poland several times as an envoy,<sup>28</sup> however, based on the available sources, we only have information about two journeys, those of 1588 and 1590.

The instructions regarding diplomatic missions are preserved in the Báthory Protocollum, kept in the Esztergom Cathedral Library (in Hungarian: Esztergomi Főszékesegyházi Könyvtár), which contains documents related to the princes of Transylvania for the period between 1583 and 1594. With the help of these instructions, it is possible to reconstruct the purposes of his travels, Bocskai's activities, and also with whom he

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levéltára (in the following: P 108) Repotorium (in the following: Rep.) 46. Fasciculus (in the following: Fasc.) G. No. 229.

25 John Cseffey: chancellery clerk, provisor of Vécs, captain of Várhegy, royal judge of Seps, Kézdi and Orbai seats. He left for Poland in the spring of 1583 as a member of the wedding procession accompanying Christina Báthory, in the summer, he visited Stephen Báthory, from whom he received 25 forints at the end of July to cover his return travel expenses. Endre Veress, *Báthory István király levélváltása az erdélyi kormánnyal, 1581–1585* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvkiadóhivatala, 1948), 96–97; Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 23. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433; Ildikó Horn, *A hatalom pillérei. A politikai elit az Erdélyi Fejedelemegység megszilárdulásának korszakában (1556–1588)* (Budapest: 2013), Academic doctoral dissertation, 179. [https://real-d.mtak.hu/581/7/dc\\_105\\_10\\_doktori\\_mu.pdf](https://real-d.mtak.hu/581/7/dc_105_10_doktori_mu.pdf) (access: 22.07.2025).

26 Jan Zamoyski to Stephen Bocskai. Krakow, 17 September 1583. MNL OL P 108 Rep. 46. Fasc. G. No. 229.

27 “Végül engem személy szerint a rokonság magánkapcsolata is segít...” / [„Finally, personally, my private relationship with my relatives also helps me...”] Stephen Bocskai to Jan Zamoyski. Kassa, 19 January 1605. Benda, *Bocskai István: Levelek*, 100. no. 42.

28 G. Etényi et al., *Koronás fejedelem*, 75.

had to cooperate during his stay abroad. An important addition to this topic is provided by the manuscripts in the estate of Endre Veress, which can be found in the Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Kézirattár Manuscript Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (in Hungarian: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Kézirattár), which contain the correspondence and other documents of Jan Zamoyski and Sigismund Báthory (1572–1613). In addition to all this, the relevant published and unpublished letters of the Bocskai correspondence should also be mentioned.

The first instruction was issued on 23 April 1588, by Sigismund Báthory, Prince of Transylvania (1586–1598, 1598–1599, 1601–1602).<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, this was addressed to his uncle, Stephen Bocskai, who was also one of his confidants, and on the other hand, to Stephen Perneszy (in Hungarian: István Perneszy), captain of Udvarhely, who was a descendant of the Transylvanian branch of a family originally from Somogy County.<sup>30</sup> The two envoys were then instructed to travel to Krakow and attend the final funeral ceremony of Stephen Báthory, who had died in 1586, to be held in May 1588 at Wawel. Sigismund III (1566–1632), King of Poland (1587–1632), informed Sigismund Báthory, through his envoy and in a letter sent in February 1588, that 23 May of that year had been designated as the date for the funeral of Stephen Báthory.<sup>31</sup> However, since Sigismund Báthory was unable to travel to Poland and attend the event, the two aforementioned envoys were entrusted with this task, and on 2 May 1588 he informed Jan Zamoyski of their departure for Krakow.<sup>32</sup> Simultaneously, the Transylvanian prince informed his cousin, Andrew Báthory (in Hungarian: András Báthory, 1563–1599), who was staying in Poland, that Bocskai and Perneszy would send him a message regarding his own affairs, and at the same time asked him to assist his two envoys during their stay abroad if necessary.<sup>33</sup> Stephen Bocskai and Stephen

29 Sigismund Báthory to Stephen Bocskai and Stephen Perneszy. [Gyulafehérvár], 23 April 1588. Esztergom Főszékesegyházi Könyvtár Batthyány gyűjtemény, Cat. IV. Tit. I. q. Ms. I. 310. Báthory-protocollum (in the following: EFK Ms. I. 310.), 265–270. Cf. Veress, *Báthory Zsigmond lengyel érdekű levelezése (1586–1594)*, 28–33. Manuscript. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 424.

30 Bálint Kis, "Erdély régi családai," *Turul* 10 (1892): 132.

31 Sigismund III to Sigismund Báthory. Krakow, 27 February 1588. EFK Ms. I. 310, 264. Cf. Endre Veress, *Báthory Zsigmond lengyel érdekű levelezése (1586–1594)*, 24. Manuscript. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms 424.

32 Sigismund Báthory to Jan Zamoyski. Gyulafehérvár, 2 May 1588. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 330. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

33 Sigismund Báthory to Andrew Báthory. [Gyulafehérvár] 23 April 1588. EFF Ms. I. 310, 271. Cf. Veress: *Báthory Zsigmond lengyel érdekű levelezése*, 34. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms 424.

Perneszy had to follow very detailed instructions, according to which they had to arrive in Krakow a few days before the funeral. Even before the funeral, after presenting their letters of credence at a royal audience, they were to greet the new Polish king, Sigismund III, and present him with horses as gifts. This was followed by a meeting and discussion with the widowed queen, Anna Jagiellon. Sigismund Báthory instructed her envoys that if the deceased's body had not yet arrived from Grodno, they should go to meet it at a distance of 3–4 days' journey ahead and accompany it further in accordance with the rules and customs prescribed by the Poles.<sup>34</sup> However, the two Transylvanian envoys are not mentioned in the Polish source describing the section of the funeral procession from Grodno to Krakow.<sup>35</sup> According to Klára Jakó they directly accompanied Sigismund III from Łobzów near Krakow – after the lying in state – to Wawel in a funeral procession that began on 23 May, behind them walked Anna Jagiellon. Besides them, the procession also included the deceased ruler's nephew, Andrew Báthory, who also was mentioned by name.<sup>36</sup>

After the funeral, the envoys had the important task of settling Stephen Báthory's estate in accordance with the deceased's will and the instructions of Sigismund Báthory. This role was not entirely unfamiliar to Stephen Bocskai, as in the spring of 1581, following the death of Christopher Báthory, he not only became a councillor, but also participated in the administration of the estate as an executor, thus already having some experience in this field.<sup>37</sup> Bocskai and Perneszy had to take into their hands and bring back to Transylvania all movable property (such as cash, gold and silver items) that, according to the testament, belonged to the Báthory family and the Principality of Transylvania, and most of which Stephen Báthory had taken from Transylvania to Poland. In the case of movable property that was missing from the estate for any reason (e.g., taken by court servants or used for the benefit of the country), compensation had to be sought. If the missing goods were used for the benefit of the country and the Poles postponed determining the method of

34 Sigismund Báthory to Stephen Bocskai and Stephen Perneszy. [Gyulafehérvár, 23 April 1588.] EFK Ms. I. 310, 265–268. Cf. Veress, *Báthory Zsigmond lengyel érdekek levelezése*, 28–31. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms 424.

35 Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Zbiór pamiętników historycznych o dawnej Polszcze* II (Warszawa: Drukiem N. Glüksberga, 1822), 451–461.

36 For information about Stephen Báthory's funeral, see: Klára Jakó, "Adalék fejedelmeink temetkezésének kérdéséhez," in *Emlékkönyv Jakó Zsigmond születésének nyolcvanadik évfordulójára* (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 1996), 199–205.

37 G. Etényi et al., *Koronás fejedelem*, 62; Horn, "Bocskai István a Báthoryak udvarában," 49; Szilágyi, *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek* III, 42.

compensation, the Prince of Transylvania appointed George Chyakor (in Hungarian: György Chyakor) as secretary to further handle the matter.<sup>38</sup>

The settlement of the probate proceeding required the cooperation of Bocskai and Perneszy with the Polish testamentary lords, such as Chancellor Jan Zamoyski, Marshal Andrzej Opaliński, Cardinal Jerzy Radziwiłł and Mikołaj Radziwiłł, the voivode of Vilna.<sup>39</sup> In addition to them, the two Transylvanian envoys contacted Francis Wesselényi (in Hungarian: Ferenc Wesselényi), also of Transylvanian origin, who had arrived in Poland with Stephen Báthory in 1576 and remained one of the ruler's confidants until his death in 1586. He held the position of court chamberlain in the court of Grodno,<sup>40</sup> and he kept the records in which Báthory's gold and silver items were listed. In addition, Bocskai and Perneszy were tasked with collecting various documents kept at the court in Grodno and transporting them back to Transylvania; these included Stephen Báthory's testament, his correspondence with others, documents concerning the Principality of Transylvania, as well as those of Johannes Michael Brutus (1517–1592), Stephen Báthory's Italian-born court historian, whose manuscript entitled Hungarian History (in Hungarian: Magyar História) also covers the history of Hungary.<sup>41</sup> The settlement of affairs progressed slowly, and weeks later, in June 1588, Bocskai was still in Krakow. From there, he sent a letter to John Ghiczy (in Hungarian: János Ghiczy, ?–1589), governor of Transylvania, in which he noted that the new Polish king, Sigismund III, had brought about many changes, and that fewer and fewer people could be trusted.<sup>42</sup>

38 Sigismund Báthory to Stephen Bocskai and Stephen Perneszy. [Gyulafehérvár], 23 April 1588. EFK Ms. I. 310, 268–270. Cf. Veress, *Báthory Zsigmond lengyel érdekekű levelezése*, 31–33. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms 424.

39 *Ibidem*.

40 For the years of Francis Wesselényi spent in Poland with Stephen Báthory, see: Dominik Kadzik, "The Political Career of Gáspár Bekes and Ferenc Wesselényi in Poland-Lithuania during the Reign of Stefan Batory," *Prace Historyczne* 148/4 (2021): 680–685.

41 Sigismund Báthory to Stephen Bocskai and Stephen Perneszy. [Gyulafehérvár], 23 April 1588. EFK Ms. I. 310, 268–270. Cf. Endre Veress, *Báthory Zsigmond lengyel érdekekű levelezése*, 31–33. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms 424.

42 G. Etényi et al., *Koronás fejedelem*, 75. In the absence of references and other clues, I have not yet been able to find the letter mentioned in the literature.

## Stephen Bocskai's Polish relations in the first half of the 1590s

The next information about Stephen Bocskai's Polish relations can only be found two years later, in 1590. It was then that he received his next diplomatic mission to Poland, following the death of his niece, Christina-Grizeldis Báthory. Her death was caused by an infectious disease, a type of smallpox. Jan Zamoyski informed his wife's brother, Sigismund Báthory, about the sudden health problem in early March 1590,<sup>43</sup> who, out of concern, was even ready to send his home pastor to Poland.<sup>44</sup> But it was too late: the woman passed away on 14 March, three days after the birth of her second child, who also died a few days after its mother's death.<sup>45</sup> Shortly thereafter, Zamoyski sent Piotr Ciekliński as an envoy to Sigismund Báthory. Ciekliński cautiously informed him of the death of Christina-Grizeldis Báthory, the date set for her funeral, and also contacted him regarding her estate.<sup>46</sup> Finally, since Sigismund Báthory was unable to attend the funeral in person,<sup>47</sup> on 24 April 1590 he entrusted Stephen Bocskai and the princely councillor Gregory Csáky of Körösszeg (in Hungarian: Gergely Csáky) with the task of attending and representing him at the funeral.<sup>48</sup> Regarding the details of the journey, we know that Bocskai took his wife, Margaret Hagymássy (in Hungarian: Margit Hagymássy, ?–1604), with him to Poland. On 15 May, the delegation was already near the Hungarian–Polish border, in Munkács, and requested the help of Paul Telegdy (in Hungarian: Pál Telegdy, 1564–1596), a prominent nobleman of Szabolcs County, in providing

43 Jan Zamoyski to Sigismund Báthory. Zamość, 4 March 1590. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 383–384. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

44 Sigismund Báthory to Jan Zamoyski. Gyulafehérvár, 18 March 1590. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 385–389. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

45 Veress, *Báthory István király*, 239.

46 Jan Zamoyski to Piotr Ciekliński. Warsaw, 20 March 1590. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 390–398. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433; Speech of Piotr Ciekliński. Gyulafehérvár, Mid-April 1590. *Ibidem* 401–403.

47 Sigismund Báthory to Jan Zamoyski. Gyulafehérvár, 20 April 1590. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 404–407. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

48 Sigismund Báthory to Stephen Bocskai and Gregory Csáky. Gyulafehérvár, 24 April 1590. EFK Ms. I. 310, 399–402. Cf. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár levelezése*, 414–419. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433; Stephen Bocskai and Gregory Csáky later served as envoys on several occasions (1594–1595, 1599) in delegations led by the Habsburgs (to Prague and Graz). G. Etényi et al., *Koronás fejedelem*, 115; Iván Nagy, *Magyarország családai címerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal III* (Pest: Beimel J and Kozma Vazul, 1858), 74–75.

them with a guide to reach the border.<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that during this period it was completely natural for guides to accompany and lead longer journeys; in addition to providing guidance, their task was to contribute to safe, conflict-free travel. Their work was justified not only by poor road conditions, but also by other dangers lurking for travellers (e.g., marauders, bandits, etc.).<sup>50</sup>

According to the instructions issued by Sigismund Báthory, the two envoys were first to greet the widower, Jan Zamoyski, express their condolences, and then attend the funeral held on 4 June 1590, in the town of Zamość, founded by the Polish chancellor.<sup>51</sup> The Transylvanian prince expected Stephen Bocskai and Gregory Csáky (in Hungarian: Gergely Csáky) to maintain regular contact and consultation with Cardinal Andrew Báthory, and they also had to follow his advice during their discussions with Zamoyski. Báthory had excellent Polish relations, and his ecclesiastical career was also built in Poland with the influential assistance of his uncle, Stephen Báthory. Thus, in 1582 he became canon of the Warmia bishopric, in 1583 provost of the Miechów monastery, in 1584 coadjutor and cardinal, and then in 1589 bishop of Warmia. Moreover, he was personally acquainted with Zamoyski.<sup>52</sup>

The Transylvanian envoys were tasked with negotiating with the Polish chancellor regarding the movable property of Christina-Grizeldis Báthory and the issue of dowry-counter-dowry. The dowry (*dos*) itself was given by the husband to his wife after the marriage ceremony, “out of the husband’s goods and property rights, as the status of the husband demands”,<sup>53</sup> so that during the marriage it was the husband’s property, and he also had control over it. While in the case of counter-dowry (*contrados*), the wealthier wife provided dowry for her husband. In the event of the wife’s death, the closest blood relative was entitled to claim the dowry.<sup>54</sup> However, Zamoyski also wanted to keep the dowry, the counter-dowry, and his ex-wife’s movable property, arguing that he had

49 Stephen Bocskai to Paul Telegyd. Munkács, 13 May 1590. Benda, *Bocskai István: Levelek*, 18, no. 2.

50 Sándor Takáts, “A kalauzok és kémek a török világban,” *Századok* 47 (1913): I: 265–268.

51 Sigismund Báthory to Stephen Bocskai and Gregory Csáky. Gyulafehérvár, 24 April 1590. EFK Ms. I. 310, 399–402. Cf. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 414–419. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

52 Horn, *Báthory András*, 46, 58, 76–77, 139–140.

53 János Bak, *Online Decreta Regni Mediaevalis Hungariae. The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary* (2019), II45, [https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=lib\\_mono](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=lib_mono) (access: 25.07.2025).

54 *Ibidem*; *Magyar jogtörténet*, ed. Barna Mezey (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2007), 140.

incurred very high expenses on behalf of the Báthory family after Stephen Báthory's death, and particularly in supporting Andrew Báthory's advancement. Although Sigismund Báthory was aware of these arguments, he showed goodwill towards the family and wished to maintain the cooperation and good relations in the future, but after his sister's death, he reclaimed all his property. The instruction emphasizes several times that the latter should be achieved without offending Zamoyski, using kind words and reasoned arguments, for example, drawing the Polish chancellor's attention to the fact that Sigismund Báthory had seen almost nothing of the movable property of his deceased parents, because his sister had received it and brought it into her marriage. At the same time, the envoys had to try again to get back Johannes Michael Brutus's manuscript, *Hungarian History*, since it hadn't been returned to Transylvania after 1588. Following the consultation, Gregory Csáky remained in Poland to clarify unresolved matters, while Bocskai returned to Transylvania.<sup>55</sup> Although this brief stay in Poland provided another opportunity for Bocskai and the Polish Chancellor to meet in person, they subsequently continued their contact through correspondence.

Two letters from Zamoyski to Bocskai from 1590 have survived in connection with this matter, which primarily concern the dispatch of envoys, their movements, and the forwarding of letters and copies of letters.<sup>56</sup> The letters show that Bocskai and Zamoyski communicated regularly, and their relationship was clearly close, as the chancellor was aware of Bocskai's deteriorating health,<sup>57</sup> closely following his condition and even seeking information about it from envoys arriving from Transylvania.<sup>58</sup> The conclusion of the affair over the dowry and counter-dowry ultimately became a process that dragged on for several years, the details of which are not the subject of this study,<sup>59</sup> because no data can be found on Bocskai's further involvement.

55 Sigismund Báthory to Stephen Bocskai and Gregory Csáky. Gyulaféhérvár, 24 April 1590. EFK Ms. I. 310, 399–402. Cf. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 414–419. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

56 Jan Zamoyski to Stephen Bocskai. Leopolis, 20 July 1590. MNL OL P 108 Rep. 98, Fasc. H., Nr. 178/b; Jan Zamoyski to Stephen Bocskai. Zamość, 11 September 1590. MNL OL P 108 Rep. 98, Fasc. H., Nr. 178/a.

57 I have not yet found any specific information about what illness Stephen Bocskai had at that time.

58 Jan Zamoyski to Stephen Bocskai. Leopolis, 20 July 1590. MNL OL P 108 Rep. 98, Fasc. H., Nr. 178/b.

59 Endre Veress's work entitled "Zamoyski János kancellár levelezése" contains numerous documents relating to further developments in the case.

Stephen Bocskai's Polish relations can therefore be traced back to 1583, with Jan Zamoyski being the first person involved. It can be observed that their relationship with the Báthory family played a role in their initial contact and communication. At the same time, even after the end of the dynastic connection, i.e. the death of Stephen Báthory and then his own wife, Christina-Grizeldis Báthory, Jan Zamoyski continued to pay attention and show interest in the new ruler of Transylvania, Sigismund Báthory, and through him to the whole of Transylvania,<sup>60</sup> while of course maintaining his relationship with Stephen Bocskai.

The next reference to their relationship appears in the sources in a letter dated 18 September 1594.<sup>61</sup> A few weeks after the events that took place in the political life of the Principality of Transylvania, which ultimately led the Transylvanian leadership to decide to enter the conflict between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire, the Fifteen Years' War, on the side of the Habsburgs. As a result of these upheavals, within a few weeks, Sigismund Báthory first resigned, then returned, which was followed by reprisals: execution of magnates, imprisonment, confiscation of their property.<sup>62</sup> In addition to Stephen Bocskai, another confidant of Sigismund Báthory, Francis Geszti (in Hungarian: Ferenc Geszti, 1545–1595), who was also related to Bocskai, wrote the aforementioned document.<sup>63</sup> The letter makes only cautious and brief references to the events in Transylvania, it turns out that the details can be learned from Stephen Kolozsvári (in Hungarian: István Kolozsvári), the secretary who witnessed everything with his own eyes and ears, through personal communication with Zamoyski.<sup>64</sup> The document is interesting because the Transylvanian prince himself sent Lestár Gyulaffy (1557–1605) as an envoy to Zamoyski just over two weeks later, on 6 October, to defend himself against the events that had taken place in Transylvania, especially the cruel reprisals, which the chancellor deeply condemned.<sup>65</sup>

60 Cf. Gábor Petneházi, "Exemplum et prudentia. Jan Zamoyski [cenzúrázott] Kasszandra-le levele Báthory Zsigmondnak 1593-ból," *Magyar Könyvszemle* 133/4 (2017): 384.

61 Francis Geszti and Stephen Bocskai to Jan Zamoyski. Gyulafehérvár, 18 September 1594. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 544. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

62 Sándor László Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború* (Szeged: Belvedere Meridionale, 2000), 145–147.

63 Francis Geszti and Stephen Bocskai to Jan Zamoyski. Gyulafehérvár, 18 September 1594. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 544. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433; Horn, "Bocskai István a Báthoryak udvarában," 50.

64 "Hae, quae hoc tempore in Transilvania gesta sunt..." Francis Geszti and Stephen Bocskai to Jan Zamoyski. Gyulafehérvár, 18 September 1594. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 544. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

65 Cf. *ibidem*, 545.

## Conclusion

The first phase of Stephen Bocskai's Polish relations from 1583 can be reconstructed on the basis of the sources until 1594. It is clear that the trusting and familial relationship with the Báthory family played a role in establishing and maintaining these relations. Chancellor Jan Zamoyski became the first and most stable figure in Bocskai's Polish relations. Despite their family ties, their correspondence mainly concerned diplomatic and political matters, with only occasional references to private matters. It can be concluded that there was a bilateral, i.e. symmetrical relationship and mutual communication between Bocskai and Zamoyski. However, after the letter of 1594 – for about ten years – I have not found any information in the sources about their contact, nor about Bocskai's other Polish relations. In Bocskai's correspondence during these ten years, Zamoyski appears only sporadically; for example, he refers to him as an "old and dying" man in 1601.<sup>66</sup> The surviving letters do not reveal the reason for their mutual neglect, but the chancellor himself notes in a later letter from 1605 that he had received hardly any letters from Bocskai for years.<sup>67</sup> However, Bocskai's Polish relations were only temporarily severed, from 1605 onwards, a much more diverse network of relationships can be seen, which, however, is a reflection of a radically changed political and life situation.

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Bocskai to Sigismund Báthory. Prague, 5 October 1601. Benda, *Bocskai István: levelek*, 74–83, no. 33. Jan Zamoyski was already in his sixties at that time, but I have not yet found any information about his deteriorating health during this period.

<sup>67</sup> "Accepi litteras Illustrissimae Dominationis Vestrae cum ab illa tot annorum intervallo vix unas habuissem." Jan Zamoyski to Stephen Bocskai. Warsawa, 17 February 1605. Veress, *Zamoyski János kancellár*, 675–677. MTA KIK KRKGY Ms. 433.

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