
Folia Historica Cracoviensia

*Facultas Historiae et Hereditatis Culturalis
Pontificiae Universitatis Cracoviensis Ioannis Pauli II*



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*Wydział Historii i Dziedzictwa Kulturowego
Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II w Krakowie*

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Viktor Kanász
University of Pécs

The Anatomy of a Political Assassination: The Assassination of Cardinal György Fráter (Martinuzzi) and its Consequences¹

On the stormy night of 16-17 December, 1551, soldiers of the heads of Ferdinand I's army, Marquis Giovanni Battista Castaldo, the governor general, and his deputy, Sforza Pallavicini, the chief sergeant, brutally assassinated Primate György Fráter (Martinuzzi/Utyeszenics), the Archbishop of Esztergom and the Voivode and Governor of Transylvania in his castle in Alvinc. It all happened after the monarch himself had recommended Fráter, one of the most prestigious politicians of the Kingdom of Hungary, for the red hat to Pope Julius III (1550–1555). This controversial act – although not unprecedented in the history of contemporary Europe² – created a stir throughout the Christian world, and it had effects not only on the subsequent history of the Kingdom of Hungary, but also on the relations between the Habsburgs and the papacy. The Cardinal became likened to a literary character, and his story has been engaging both Hungarian and international historians and writers ever since³.

- 1 The article was prepared in the MTA-PPKE Vilmos Fraknói Vatican Historical Research Group. I hereby thank Péter Tusor and Tamás Fedeles for the professional support and Ágnes Gátas-Palotai for her help during translation.
- 2 The murder of Juan Díaz in 1546 serves a good example (M. Hall Kirch, *Death on the Danube*, in: *Aspects of Violence in Renaissance Europe*, ed. J. Davies, Farnham 2013, pp. 61–82.), as does the case of Hans Katzianer, who was murdered by the Zrínyis. [Sz. Varga, *Europe's Leonidas: Miklós Zrínyi, Defender of Szigetvár (1508–1566)*, Budapest 2016, pp. 130–134].
- 3 The cardinal became likened to a literary character; his story has been engaging both Hungarian and international historians and writers since then. V. Kanász, *Fráter György gyilkossági perének forrásai a vatikáni levéltárban*, in: *Magyarország*

This paper seeks answers to two major questions: what were the reasons for the death of the Cardinal, and what were the consequences of the murder?

The contemporary Kingdom of Hungary

After the death of King Matthias, at the turn of the 15–16th centuries the Kingdom of Hungary was headed by Wladislaw II, and then by his son, Louis II. However, the Kingdom's southern border fortresses, the strong royal military and economic power were gradually destroyed by the Ottoman forces⁴. In 1526 the young Louis II was personally fighting against Suleiman the Magnificent, and he was killed in the Battle of Mohács. This was followed by a decades-long internal struggle for the throne between Habsburg Ferdinand I (1526–1564)⁵ and the Voivode of Transylvania, John Zápolya (1526–1540)⁶. Zápolya was elected king (hereafter John I) in 1526 and crowned in Székesfehérvár. Ferdinand, however, did not accept him as king and he had himself crowned on 3 November, 1527. As he proved to be less powerful than the Habsburgs, King John I asked for and received help from Suleiman the Magnificent, after which the Eastern territory of the country – which was controlled by Zápolya – came under more and more powerful Ottoman influence⁷.

és a római Szentszék II. Vatikáni magyar kutatások a 21. században, ed. P. Tusor, K. Szovák, T. Fedeles, Budapest–Róma 2017, pp. 173–185, pp. 173.; T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát. Fráter György (1482–1551)*, Pécs–Budapest 2017, pp. 11–12., V. Kanász, *Fráter György meggyilkolásának ikonográfiai megjelenítése*, "Studia Theologica Transsylvaniensia" vol. XXI, no. 2 (2018), pp. 141–164.

4 In more detail on this: *Ottomans, Hungarians, and Habsburgs in Central Europe, The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest*, ed. G. Dávid, P. Fodor, Leiden 2000; *Fight Against the Turk in Central-Europe in the First Half of the 16th Century*, ed. I. Zombori, Budapest 2004; *The Jagiellonians in Europe, Dynastic Diplomacy and Foreign Relations*, ed. A. Bárány, Debrecen 2016; and G. Ágoston, *Ottoman Conquest and the Ottoman Military Frontier in Hungary*, in: *A Millennium of Hungarian Military History*, ed. B. Király, L. Veszprémy, New York 2002, pp. 85–110.

5 Ferdinand I was the brother of Emperor Charles V and Mary of Hungary, the widow of Louis II.

6 On the voivodship of Zápolya and on his actions until 1526: T. Neumann, *Dózsa legyőzője. Szapolyai János erdélyi vajdasága (1510–1526)*, "Székelyföld", vol. XVIII, no. 11 (2014), pp. 93–107; T. Neumann, *The Beginnings of the Voivode of Transylvania's Right of Donation*, "Banatica" XXVI, II, Cluj–Napoca 2016, pp. 279–296. On the clashes between John Zápolya and Ferdinand I: Z. Korpás, *V. Károly és Magyarország*, Budapest 2008.

7 G. Barta, *A Sztambulba vezető út, 1526–1528*, Budapest 1983; *Hungarian–Ottoman Military and Diplomatic Relations in the Age of Süleyman the Magnificent*, ed. G. Dávid, P. Fodor, Budapest 1994.



1. György Fráter among his fellow monks. The painting can be found in the porch of the monastery of Częstochowa (17th century)

After a long internal struggle, the situation returned to normal in 1538, when the two kings made peace on the basis of the status quo in Várad (Oradea) and agreed that after the death of John I, his territories would descend to Ferdinand I. Thereafter, the old king married Isabella Jagellon, the daughter of Sigismund I of Poland and Bona Sforza, who was raised in Krakow and had spent a long time in Buda in her younger years⁸, and so knew the Hungarian circumstances well. In September of 1540 they had a son⁹. Zápolya died in 1540; on his death-bed he commissioned the noblemen around him to do their best in favour of his son, John Sigismund. In obeying the last will of the deceased king, his noblemen were not willing to give over their part of the country to Ferdinand I: they crowned the infant John Sigismund as king, and he became King John II. They expected support from the Sultan and Sigismund I of Poland¹⁰. Among these noblemen was György Fráter, one of the most influential followers of the deceased king.

8 K. Rábai, *Jagelló Zsigmond herceg udvarának számadáskönyve (1504–1507). The Court Account Book of Sigismund Jagiellon (1504–1507)*, Szeged 2014.

9 The Zápolyas and the Jagiellos had previous relations: the daughter of John Zápolya, Borbála was the first wife of King Sigismund.

10 P. Tóth, *A lengyel királyi kancellária Libri Legationum sorozatának magyar vonatkozású iratai II. 1526–1541*, Miskolc 2003, pp. 295–300, 347–348, 395–396.

The story of György Fráter

The character of György Fráter was already divisive even in his time¹¹. Some regarded him as a saint monk, while others took him to be a 'devilish friar', who for selfish ends gave the country over to the Ottomans. Fráter was born in Croatia — in the castle of Kamicsác (Kamičac) — in 1482 as a member of a family of lesser nobility. His father — who served as a soldier for Palatine Stephan Zápolya, and then died during a battle against the Ottomans — was Gergely Utyaszenich, and his mother was Anna Martinusevics (Martinušević)¹². After his mother's name of Italian origin, the name of Martinuzzi evolved and it was later widely used in Europe. He started to use the name of Brother György, or György Fráter (Monk) (*Frater Georgius, Georgius Monachus*) after he joined the Pauline order. Fráter had three brothers and a sister. His brothers, Miklós, Mátyás and Jakab, also served in the military, and Jakab fell in the Ottoman siege of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) in 1521. He recounted his early years in a letter addressed to Antal Verancsics, the provost of Buda, as follows:

I am from a noble and ancient Croatian family, my motherland is Kamicsác known from its excellent castle. Gergely Utyesenic was my father, my mother Anna was born in the old noble family of the Martinusevicses. I turned eight, when by leaving my native land I arrived at the court of the splendid John Corvinus, who sent me to Transylvania to his own castle of Hunyad. I lived there for thirteen years, certainly not devoid of the great poverty of the courtiers. Later, when I was twenty, I moved to the decent court of my late, most gracious lord, King John's mother. As life at court did not appeal to me anymore, by entering their bond, I spent four years in the order of the hermit monks, who were illiterate. However, after a certain kind and educated hermit introduced me the art of literacy, by taking the holy orders, I became the prominent head of many monasteries in succession¹³.

11 His name appears in various ways: Utissenius, Utješenić, Utyeszenovics, Utješenić. On the life of György Fráter, the latest: T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit.; G. Nemeth Papo, A. Papo, *Frate Giorgio Martinuzzi. Cardinale, soldato e statista dalmata agli albori del Principato di Transilvania*, Aracne 2017.

12 T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit., pp. 34–36.

13 L. Szalay, *Verancsics Antal m. kir. helytartó, esztergomi érsek összes munkái 6. Vegyes levelek, 1538–1549*, Pest 1860, pp. 183–185; G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?*



2. György Fráter hands the Hungarian crown over to Ferdinand I. The painting can be found in the porch of the monastery of Częstochowa (17th century)

As a consequence, he spent his early days in the courts of János Corvin, Hedvig of Teschen, and János Szapolyai as a court soldier. Later, he left the army and joined the Order of St. Paul and he is likely to have stayed in the friaries of Budaszentlőrinc, Sajólád and Częstochowa. In 1527 he returned from Poland to the friary of Sajólád, where he became a provost.

1528 brought a turning point in the life of Fráter: after having met Zápolya, who was escaping towards Poland from the defeat of Szina (Seña) of 8 March, he left the monastic life behind and entered into the service of Zápolya. He wrote the following about this event:

King Louis being deceased in the Battle of Mohács, King John was elected the king of Hungary by the mutual wish of the estates, however later he was chased out of Buda by the army of Ferdinand and lost a battle at the market-town of Szina — at that time I was summoned from the monastery of Sajólád by the king to handle over certain values of his on trust, which I refused. Later, King John, who was abandoned by his own, went to Poland where I voluntarily followed him. I returned from Poland on foot three times and served the case

Budapest 1988, pp. 10–11; T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit. pp. 37–38; Genealogy: E. Petrichevich Horváth, *Fráter György leszármazása*, "Magyar családtörténeti Szemle", vol. VII, no. 10 (1941), pp. 223–231.

of the king, him, the pauper in Hungary with the generosity of the Hungarian noblemen. [...] I made it happen that by remaining loyal to King John, they visited the king in Poland from Hungary for the sake of paying their respect, and then they welcomed the returning king to Hungary when he reached the borders of the country and did not hesitate to go to meet him with a prepared army¹⁴.

From this time on, he was loyal to the Zápolya family for good. He was the vassal of Zápolya already in the early 1530s¹⁵. He got his first serious commission from Lodovico Gritti, who was a viceroy appointed by Zápolya, in 1532, when he became the court magistrate (provisor) of Buda¹⁶. After this he continuously climbed the social ladder — owing to his outstanding ability to organize, his military experience and his political vein — and became one of the most important people of Zápolya¹⁷. In 1534 not only did he become a royal councillor (*consiliarius regiae maiestatis*), but also a treasurer (*thesaurarius*) and successfully put the chaotic finances of the royal treasury in order. He actively assisted in achieving the above-mentioned Peace of Várad in 1538; he was as well one of those who urged the marriage with Isabella in 1539¹⁸. His importance is well-demonstrated by the fact that after the death of János Zápolya, Fráter was entrusted with the guardianship of John Sigismund¹⁹. His career in the church started to rise at that time. In

14 L. Szalay, *Verancsics Antal...*, op. cit., pp. 185; G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?...* op. cit., pp. 11; T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit., pp. 43. In the battles, King John was also assisted by Polish troops in support. J. B. Szabó, *János király döntő csatái. Tokaj, 1527 és Szina, 1528*, in: *Elfeledett háborúk. Középkori csaták és várostromok (6–16. század)*, ed. L. Pószán, L. Veszprémy, Budapest 2016, pp. 426–442.

15 Zs. Simon, *Szapolyai János familiárisainak egy lajstroma 1531-ből*, „Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis, sectio philosophica”, vol. XIII, no. 3 (2008), pp. 315–332.

16 F. Szakály, *Lodovico Gritti in Hungary 1529–1534. A Historical Insight into the Beginnings of Thurco-Habsburgian Rivalry*, Budapest 1995, pp. 73.

17 It is said that Ferdinand I once pronounced that he did not envy John anything but the Monk, since his talent was worth the power of ten thousand soldiers. T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit., pp. 44.

18 On 10 March, 1542, Queen Bona Sforza wrote a letter to György Fráter, in which she mentioned that Fráter had been the one who had realized the marriage and had her daughter taken to Hungary. T. Oborni, *Izabella királyné erdélyi udvarának kezdetei (1541–1551)*, *Történelmi Szemle*, vol. LI, no. 1 (2009), pp. 21–43.

On the proposal: P. Kasza, *Egy korszakváltás szemtanúja. Brodarics István pályaképe*, Pécs–Budapest 2015, pp. 131–138.

19 'By placing every confidence in Brother György, he put his son upon the care of his', ed. L. Makkai, *Mindszenti Gábor diáriuma öreg János király haláláról*, Budapest 1977, p. 22.

1534 he became the elected bishop of Várad (*electus episcopus Varadiensis*) and obtained the hereditary title of the Ispán of Bihar County²⁰.

As mentioned above, in 1541 the noblemen of Zápolya did not cede control of the Eastern territory to Ferdinand I, and as a consequence, the Habsburg monarch invaded Buda, although he was unable to occupy it. In the meantime, Suleiman arrived there with his relief troops and unprecedentedly occupied Buda by trickery and converted it into a vilayet-centre. As well, the young king John Sigismund and Queen Isabella Jagiellon were sent to the Eastern part of the country with Fráter²¹. All this was enormously traumatic for contemporary Hungary, and many blamed the Pauline monk. Fráter also had a guilty conscience, and thus turned to King Ferdinand. From this time on his main purpose became the unification of the country.

Fráter succeeded in the organization of the Eastern part of the country, which later became the Principality of Transylvania²². The benefit from the trade as well as the incomes and estates of the bishoprics of Várad (Oradea) and Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) meant the most important basis of this²³. Apart from this, György Fráter slowly gained full authority in Transylvania: he became the general, treasurer, chief justice, voivode and lieutenant-governor of Transylvania²⁴.

20 Pope Paul III confirmed the appointment only in 1539.

21 On this: P. Rausch, „Így kele az kincses Buda az Szolimán terek császár kezébe”–*Verancsics Antal tanulmánya Buda ostromáról és elfoglalásáról (1541)*, “Publicatio-nes Universitatis Miskolcensis, sectio philosophica”, vol. XIV, no. 3 (2009), pp. 145–192; Gy. Domokos, N. Mátyus, *Antonio Mazza és Buda ostromáról írott jelentése*, Lymbus, 2016, pp. 37–75; T. Oborni, *Fráter György és Buda eleste*, “Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából”, vol. XLII, 2017, pp. 39–60.; P. Fodor, *The Unbearable Weight of Empire. The Ottomans in Central Europe – A Failed Attempt at Universal Monarchy (1390–1566)*, Budapest 2015, pp. 97.

22 T. Oborni, *From Province to Principality: Continuity and Change in Transylvania in the First Half of the Sixteenth Century*, in: *Fight against the Turk in Central-Europe in the First Half of the 16th Century*, ed. I. Zombori, Budapest 2004, pp. 165–189.

23 The statements also spoke of Fráter's commercial and economic businesses, e.g. ASV Misc. Arm. II, vol. 61. fol. 106r. See literature: T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit., pp. 258–264.; I. Draskóczy, *A magyarországi kőszó bányászata és kereskedelme (1440–1530-as évek)*, Budapest 2018, pp. 338, 341, 353.

24 On this, e.g. Zs. Bogdáni, *Fráter György bírói működésének emlékei Bácsi János formuláskönyvében*, “Történelmi Szemle”, vol. LVI, no. 4 (2014), pp. 621–638; T. Oborni, *Fráter György kincstartósága Erdélyben*, in: *Híd a századok felett. Tanulmányok Katus László 70. születésnapjára*, ed. M. Nagy, Pécs 1997, pp. 61–76; In the National Archives of Hungary there are several sources regarding Martinuzzi's work as a judge as well as an officer: e.g. HU - MNL - OL - E 21 - 1551.08.29, P 419 - A - 2. - No. 27., P 5 - 1. - 1547 - No. 2., P 55 - 5. - 16. - No. 2., P 644 - 1. - No. 37., R 298 - II. - 1. - No. 23.

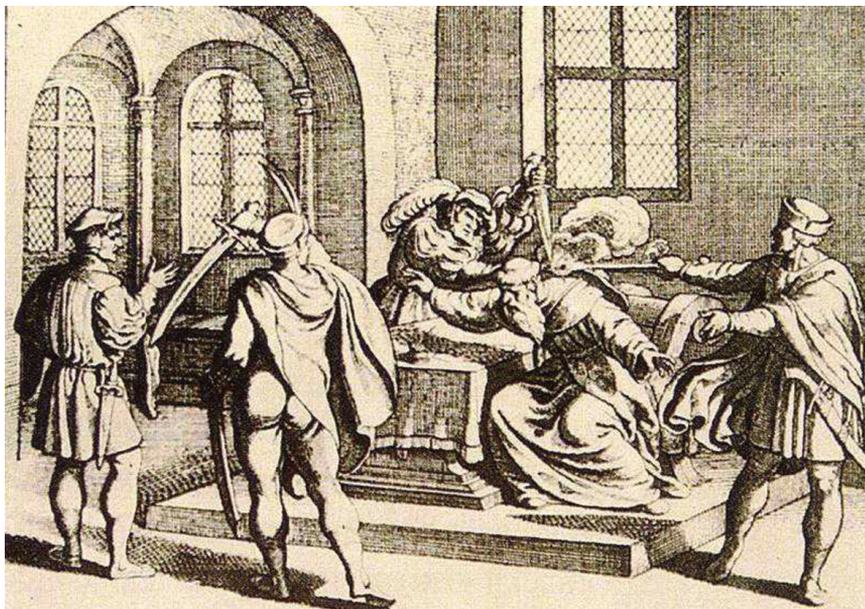
3. Pope Julius III makes György Fráter a cardinal. The painting can be found in the porch of the monastery of Częstochowa (17th century)



Using this authority he achieved the signing of the treaty of Nyírbátor with Ferdinand's diplomats on 8 September, 1549. According to this, Isabelle would hand her territories over to Ferdinand in exchange for the Duchies of Opole (Oppeln) and Racibórz (Ratibor) and 100,000 Forints; furthermore, John Sigismund could marry the daughter of Ferdinand, Johanna. The only condition was to send a proper and strong army to Transylvania, fit for a king, to beat back a possible Ottoman attack. The queen was not invited to the negotiations and when she heard of them, she denounced Fráter to Suleiman; above all, her followers launched an armed riot under the leadership of Péter Petrovics. In the meantime, the answer of the Sultan arrived: Fráter should be arrested or executed; Suleiman's soldiers set off towards Transylvania.

Owing to the quick military actions, his outstanding acting talent and his astuteness, Fráter avoided the attack with a genius diplomatic stunt, and he misled the Ottomans. In May 1551 the conflict between Isabelle and Fráter was reignited, which Fráter overcame again. In the summer, Ferdinand's army of many thousands of soldiers – among which were some Spanish soldiers – headed by Giovanni Battista Castaldo, and Tamás Nádasdy the lord chief justice arrived²⁵. Consequently, Isabelle had no other choice

25 T. Oborni, *Izabella királyné...*, op. cit., 32–33; On Castaldo's actions: L. Kropf, *Castaldo Erdélyben*, "Hadtörténelmi Közlemények", vol. VIII, no. 1 (1895), pp. 350–366, pp. 509–521, vol. IX, no. 1 (1896), pp. 53–72, 161–186, 299–325, 465–483; Gy. Szekfű,



4. The assassination of György Fráter. The copper engraving of Matthäus Merian (17th century)

but to sign her resignation on behalf of her son in Szászsebes (Sebeş) on 19 June, 1551, with which she recognised the restoration of Ferdinand's rule. Thereafter, she handed the Sacred Crown and the royal insignia over to the men of Ferdinand and moved to Kassa (Košice), and finally to Poland, from where she returned to Transylvania only in 1556²⁶.

Két historiographus Castaldo erdélyi seregében, "Századok", vol. XLVIII, no. 1 (1914), pp. 17–33; Á. Ritoókné Szalay, *Egy olasz emlékiró Castaldo erdélyi kíséretében*, in: *Kutak. Tanulmányok a XV–XVI. századi magyarországi művelődés köréből*, Budapest 2012, pp. 174–178; F.-N. Ardelean, *On the Foreign Mercenaries and Early Modern Military Innovations in East Central Europe. Castaldo's Army in Transylvania and the Banat*, in: *Mozgó frontvonalak. Háború és diplomácia a várháborúk időszakában. 1552–1568*, ed. Gy. Bujdosóné Pap, I. Fejér, Á. H. Szilasi, Eger 2017, pp. 117–128, *Bernardo de Aldana magyarországi hadjárata [1548–1552]*, ed. F. Szakaly Budapest 1986; N. Virovecz, *Száműzetéstől főkapitányságig. Balassa Menyhárt és az erdélyi hatalomváltás (1549–1552)*, "Hadtörténelmi Közlemények", vol. CXXVIII, no. 1 (2015), pp. 31–54; Z. Korpás, J. B. Szabó, *Ha követségbe jöttek, sokan vannak, de ha katonának, kevesen. Az 1550-es országegyesítési kísérlet katonai hátteréhez: 16. századi Habsburg haderők és stratégiák Európában*, in: *Mozgó frontvonalak...*, op. cit., pp. 89–116.

26 They heard of Fráter's murder in Kassa (Košice), upon which Isabelle reacted as follows: "Quod vero Maiestas Vestras Serenissimam ex sua singulari gratia et favore contextam gestorum reverendissimi quondam Fratris Georgii episcopi historiam nobis describere dignata est, agimus Maiestati Vestrae Serenissimae gratias immensas,

In the meantime, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha launched an attack and occupied Becse (Bečej), Becskerek (Zrenjanin), Csanád, and Lippa (Lipova). To save what he could Fráter sent the annual tax to Istanbul on behalf of John Sigismund, and concerning the departure of Isabelle and John Sigismund he reported that they had travelled to Kassa only for the wedding of the young king. With the help of this lie he regained the trust of the Ottoman leadership. Besides, he realized that the army they had provided would be insufficient to fend off a probable Ottoman revenge attack; therefore he sent letters for help throughout Europe²⁷.

There were many factors at work behind the scenes. One of the most significant roots of the antagonism was of a financial nature: Isabella continuously found the sum sent for her household by Fráter unsatisfactory. Fráter's attitude – not only towards the queen – meant a further problem, since the Monk always left the young widow out of political decisions. The queen regularly complained about playing only a subordinate role in her own court, since her brother György was in command of everything²⁸. As one can see, this latter accusation had some truth.

The background of the assassination

As already mentioned, Fráter had succeeded in deposing and removing Isabelle from Transylvania and inviting the Habsburg troops to the territory by executing the unification of the country. To honour his deeds, Pope Julius III, on the recommendation of Ferdinand I, made Fráter a cardinal at the consistorial meeting of 12 October, 1551. He also received the title of Archbishop of Esztergom, by which he became the head of the Hungarian church administration²⁹.

sed mirum nobis non est, quod sic se erga Maiestatem Vestram Serenissimam ille gesserit. Noveramus enim malo et [a]jerumnis nostris nos antea quoque ingenium et stratagemata hominis hisdem enim omnibus modis et tramitibus imo multo pluribus et tristioribus consueverat ille nos et filium nostrum communem Illustrissimum in diversas incommoditates et discrimina inducere". ASV Misc. Arm II 61. 19v.

27 For instance to Charles V, to the cardinals and the pope. Á. Károlyi, *Fráter levelézése 1535–1551*, Budapest, 1881, pp. 279–281, 317–318, as well as: ASV Misc., Arm. II, vol. 55, fol. 297v–298v.

28 A. Papo, *György Martinuzzi Utyeszenics e la regina Isabella Jagellone: protagonisti e antagonisti della storia ungherese nel XVI secolo*, "Crisia" vol. XLI (2011), pp. 161–169.

29 *Consistorialia Documenta Pontificia de Regnis Sacrae Coronae Hungariae (1426–1605)*, ed. P. Tusor, G. Nemes, Budapest–Rome 2011, pp. 102–103; P. Tusor, *The Papal Consistories and Hungary in the 15th–16th Centuries. To the History of the Hungarian Royal Patronage and Supremacy*, Budapest–Rome 2012, p. 31. Martinuzzi's



5. The assassination of György Fráter. The painting can be found in the porch of the monastery of Częstochowa (17th century)

Despite all his successes, he could not handle an enormous problem: he was surrounded by immense mistrust. This was for many reasons. His iron will and implacability, and his role as treasurer during the filling of the treasury, made him many enemies. To make matters worse, Fráter was reserved and suspicious of everyone, sharing his political ideas with nobody. As a result, he became isolated. The negative effect of his outstanding diplomatic ability was that his contemporaries did not understand his actions. However, the greatest scandal was that Fráter was in a constant diplomatic relationship with not only the Sultan and the elite of Istanbul, but also with the Ottoman leaders of the Balkan and the Hungarian territories under Ottoman rule, and he often welcomed the chiausues of the Ottomans. While he swore allegiance to the king, he regularly sent his envoys to the court of the Sultan; moreover, he had a house in Istanbul as his permanent residence³⁰.

appointment as a cardinal had been on the agenda for years. Á. Károlyi, *Fráter György levelezése...*, op. cit., pp. 184, 277, 285.

30 V. Kanász, *The Testimony of Miklós Oláh Given during the Investigation of the Murder of György Fráter*, in: *Proceedings of the International Conference on the 450th Anniversary of Nicolaus Olahus' Death*, ed. E. R. Szilágyi, Wien 2019. [in press]. It is interesting that while Fráter's relations with the Ottomans played a key role in the distrust of the Habsburg court, in Istanbul, his relations with Ferdinand I garnered attention. In 1548, this information was passed to the sultan from one of the henchmen of the Beylerbey of Buda: "The envoys of Fráter frequently visit Ferdinand; they inform him [the monarch] about every step of the blessed Padishah. The Monk is building and strengthening a castle day and night. Along with Ferdinand, his envoy attends the negotiations with Charles to inform the Monk immediately about any decisions that are made. I have heard that the Monk had all of his soldiers

6. György Fráter on his funeral bier. The painting can be found in the porch of the monastery of Częstochowa (17th century)



Fráter's independence and obstinacy generated further problems, as he also opposed the will of Ferdinand I. This is proven by the testimony of Miklós Oláh, the bishop of Eger and the later archbishop of Esztergom, who also gave voice to his experience: once he heard in the royal council that Fráter did not write to the sultan and the pasha what had been instructed by the king, but what he wanted³¹. There is a good example of this: in late 1551, Ferdinand I wanted to continue the anti-Ottoman battles, but Fráter, defying the orders of the king, sent the diminished and exhausted Transylvanian army home.

As a consequence of it all, although Fráter had successfully organized the union of the country by misleading the Ottomans in a masterly manner, Tamás Nádasdy and Giovanni Battista Castaldo – who headed the Habsburg troops arriving in Transylvania – did not trust him. Moreover, they

be on the alert with the intention that if the monarch and his brother, Charles launched a war, he could fly to their assistance. He did not handed the castle of Becse [Bečej] over to the blessed Padishah for the simple reason that if the monarch came with a massive army, he would also rise up and aid him. If the monarch did not come, presumable he would have to give it [the castle of Becse] over." G. Dávid, P. Fodor, *Oszmán hírszerzés Magyarországon*, in: *Információáramlás a magyar és török végvári rendszerben*, ed. T. Petercsák, M. Berecz, Eger 1999, pp. 197–202.

³¹ V. Kanász, *The Testimony of Miklós Oláh...* op. cit., ASV Misc. Arm. II, vol. 61. fol. 106v.

took it for granted that he would betray them and would deliver the Christian army into the hands of the Ottomans. This lack of trust occurred soon after arriving to Transylvania, when on 12 June, Nádasdy wrote the following to the king: 'I altered from being foolish to a half-witted person, because I cannot understand and comprehend that I have the same information today as I had on my first day when I arrived to Transylvania, and I cannot write to Your Royal Highness any certain other than we are all in the hand of this hermit monk, who could save us as well as make us be defeated, he does as he wants. And if he wanted to save us and himself: if the Ottomans are approaching in the number that it is rumoured, and Your Royal Highness did not send us more troops, this country would be reduced to nothing, and Transylvania would have the day of 6,000 martyrs'³².

Castaldo's opinion does not differ from Nádasdy's. He informed the king in his letter of 5 June, as follows: 'I can understand the change of his [Fráter] soul almost in every hour better and better, and I see that he is forever postponing everything against us and for the benefit of his. I beg Your Royal Highness [...] to inform me what to do, if I experience that something dark business is being prepared, how could we outwit and prevent it [...]'³³. The letter of the king was not delayed; on 20 July this answer was addressed to the general: 'We understood your cryptic notes. Although, we hope that Brother György behaves well and loyal, we order and command you to act as our country and the needs of our subject's demand, if you see that he obviously wishes to harm us'³⁴. In his later letter he also wrote to Castaldo that 'as long as Your Honour sees that Brother György postpones his own evil intention, you do have to pretend to give less reason for him for treason [...]. However, if you were to observe that the case could not be handled otherwise than you let yourself be killed or Your Honour had the monk killed, do your utmost to precede him and do away with him, rather than wait for the first stroke and be preceded at the expense of the country and the whole Christianity'³⁵. With this letter, the king – who did not meet the monk in person despite many attempts – literally gave a free hand to Castaldo. The mercenary commander's feelings against the Monk became even more negative, and in November 1551, he wrote the following to the

32 G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?...*, op. cit., pp. 212–213.

33 T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit., pp. 237.

34 T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit., pp. 238.

35 G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?...*, op. cit., pp. 216.



7. The assassination of György Fráter. Copper engraving of Johann Andreas Thelott and Georg Andreas Wolfgang from 1694

king: 'Deeper intelligence than that of a mankind has would not be enough to see through the nature and character of the monk. He laughs and cries, promises and opposes, expresses holy intent and innate wickedness at the same time. Once he raises suspicion, once he justifies everything. I would rather consider him Ottoman, than Christian, rather Lucifer, than John'³⁶.

On the other hand, Castaldo could not handle the Transylvanian circumstances. His situation

was made worse by the fact that he could not speak Hungarian, and he was very irritated that Fráter did not ask for his opinion concerning military matters. He cultivated his friendship with queen Isabelle, who was fluent in Italian and who estranged him from the hated Fráter. As a result of it all, there were constant differences of opinion between them, and the mercenary commander became more and more concerned – in harmony with the public opinion (*fama publica*) – that Fráter would betray them and the Christian army³⁷.

He had many serious rows with the monk, although the straw that broke the camel's back was the siege of Lippa. As mentioned above, the pasha occupied the Hungarian fortress, although in the autumn the Christian troops launched a siege. At the war council of 6 November, opposed to Castaldo, Fráter wanted to let the Ottoman

36 G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?...*, op. cit., pp. 212–213.

37 T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit., pp. 246. Apart from Castaldo, the Spanish Aldana also found the Monk untrustworthy. Z. Korpás, *Egy spanyol zsoldosvezér levelei a XVI. század közepén vívott magyarországi háborúkról. Adalékok Bernardo de Aldana magyarországi tevékenységéhez (1548–1552)*, "Fons", vol. 6 (1999), pp. 3–129.

garrison go unharmed. Finally, the war council of late November decided that the garrison led by Bey Uliman could disengage freely, and then – according to many witnesses – on the occasion of their marching out in December, foodstuffs, rifles, presents and protection were to be provided by Fráter.

The murder happened on 17 December, in the hours after midnight. Many accounts are known, among which Marcantonio Ferrari, who was present, described the event in detail. According to his narration Sforza Pallavicini and Captain Pedro d'Avila summoned armed people to the Monk's castle in Alvinc and, while a storm raged

outside, they entered Fráter's room. 'The door opened in haste and the monk, who was reading by leaning on the desk, drew back to the wall by seeing what was happening and how we entered with such clamour. I thought it was the time to finish that business [...]. I stabbed his neck twice [...]. He opened his arms and started to say, oh, oh, oh... as if he wanted to shout. [...] I stepped back; therefore I could see better what was happening inside. Sforza Pallavicini stabbed a knife in his body, from which he fell and almost at the same time Captain Menino shot him with a matchlock, some state that he fell from this and not from the stab. God knows! Others were slashing him after he fell [...]'³⁸. Bernardo de Aldana tells the story in a similar way: 'By arriving to the room of the monk, Marco Antonio knocked [...], the monk was already on his feet, he was praying from his Book of Hours; Marco Antonio handed the papers to him, and when he started to read them, he drew a dagger and stabbed the monk



8. The death of György Fráter. Painted by Kálmán Istókovits in 1947 and kept in the Central Seminary

38 T. Oborni, *Az ördögös Barát...*, op. cit., pp. 241.

many times, though, he was not seriously harmed. Then the monk cried for servants and stabbed his dagger into Marco Antonio with such power that he knocked against the wall by backing two steps. By the voice of the monk the four Spanish riflemen appeared in the room, who was hiding behind the door with Sforza and Captain Andrés Lopez, three of them immediately shot him before he fell prone on his bed and shouted: "Jesus Maria! Jesus Maria! Quare hoc mihi?" And while the monk was breathing his last, Sforza Pallavicini appeared there and gave him a backhanded slap with his sword that almost cut off his half head; it is said that Sforza and the other Spanish soldiers got past their rage on the monk to such an extent that they cut more than one of his covered and uncovered body parts [...]³⁹. Thereupon, as tangible proof of the murder, they cut off one of the ears of the victim and presented it to Ferdinand⁴⁰. After the assassination, the corpse was kept unburied in a wooden chest for seventy days on the entrenchment of the castle, and then it was buried in Gyulafehérvár. Summing up the view of many contemporaries, the famous historiographer of the age, Ferenc Forgách expressed his opinion as follows: 'This became the end of the man that was famous in peace and war and who cannot be despised at all and would have deserved the honour of keeping Transylvania and Hungary, if his thirst for power and his greed had not plunged him into betrayal by staining his good name and good deeds with a single sin'⁴¹.

The investigation of the Holy See

After news of the murder spread, Ferdinand's people (e.g. Pál Gregoriánczi, the Bishop of Zagreb) did their utmost in vain to appease the anger of the Pope. On hearing of the incident, by virtue of canon law Pope Julius III excommunicated the perpetrators of the murder, Marquis Giovanni Battista Castaldo and Chief Sergeant Sforza Pallavicini. Ferdinand I received only a temporary absolution⁴². This whole business affected the king rather

39 *Bernardo de Aldana...*, op. cit., Budapest 1986, pp. 187.

40 *1504–1566. Memoria rerum. A Magyarországon legutóbbi László király fiának legutóbbi Lajos királynak születése óta esett dolgok emlékezete (Verancsics-évkönyv)*, ed. J. Bessenyei, Budapest 1981, pp. 97; *Bernardo de Aldana...*, op. cit., pp. 187.

41 *Humanista történetírók*, ed. P. Kulcsár, Budapest 1977, pp. 592.

42 On its canonical background: A. Szuromi Szabolcs, *A püspök erőszakos halála kánonjogi szempontból. Megjegyzések Fráter György halálához*, "Iustum aequum salutare", vol. VI, no. 1 (2010), pp. 119–124. On Papal-Hungarian relations: P. Tusor, *The Hungarian Episcopate and the Papacy after 1526*, in: *The Jagiellonians in Europe...*,



9. The death of György Fráter. Painted by Kálmán Istókovits (Castle Museum of Siklós)

awkwardly. In March 1552, he ordered the establishment of a body of four cardinals to investigate the case⁴³. An often halting, detailed and complex examination process started, lasting until 1554. The case rested upon the articles collected by the lawyers of Ferdinand and the Pope, the main purpose of which was to prove the monk's betrayal or innocence by throwing light on the legitimacy of the murder⁴⁴.

Until 7 February, 1554, in this very delicate and confused diplomatic situation, which resounded with the Valois-Habsburg conflict, the inner

op. cit., pp. 185–206. From an international perspective: K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571)*, vol. IV, Philadelphia 1984, pp. 566–580.

43 V. Fraknoi, *Magyarország egyházi és politikai összeköttetései a római szent-székel, A mohácsi véstől Magyarországnak a török járom alól fölszabadításáig, 1526–1689*, vol. III, Budapest 1903, p. 81; G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?...*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

44 O. Utješinović, *Lebensgeschichte Des Cardinals Georg Utješinović Genannt Martinusius: Mit Dessen Bildniss, Familien-Wappen Und Einer Skizze Der Ruinen Seines Ahnenschlosses*, Wien 1881, (Urkundenbuch) n. XVI, pp. 62–73; *Lettere di principi. Fejedelmi levelek a pápának (1518–1578)*, ed. J. Bessenyei, Rome–Budapest 2002, pp. 210–233; and: ASV Arch. Arcis, Arm. I–XVIII, n. 1711, fol. 46r–52v; ASV Misc., Arm. II, vol. 61, fol. 26r–33r.

struggle of Charles V's empire and with the tumult of religious battles, the examination was led by Count Abbot Girolamo Martinengo, who was of an old Lombard patrician family and the papal nuncio to the court of King Ferdinand⁴⁵. He worked mainly in the hereditary provinces – mostly in Vienna and Graz – and in Hungary. His main task was to summon and hear the witnesses who were associated with Fráter and collected by Ferdinand's people; to take down the statements; and to collect the letters and extracts that could be used as evidence and to prepare their authentic copy and their translation if necessary. A wide range of witnesses were heard: there were members of lesser nobility, burghers (e.g. Farkas Schreiber⁴⁶), doctors (e.g. György Blandrata⁴⁷), bishops (Pál Bornemissza⁴⁸, Antal Verancsics⁴⁹), secular noblemen (e.g. Tamás Nádasdy⁵⁰, the future primate) and some of foreign origin (e.g. Corradus Vall De Aurach⁵¹).

For this enormous task he was provided a proper staff; however, these lawyers, secretaries and councillors were mainly appointed by Ferdinand⁵². As Martinengo did not want to travel to remote, dangerous war-stricken Transylvania, the provost of Vienna Martin Bondenarius went there on his behalf to hear the witnesses as a *subdelegatus*⁵³. At first the nuncio himself was supposed to visit one of the 'crown-witnesses' of the examination, Queen Isabelle in Poland – who had been living there since 1552. Finally Bondenarius was chosen to do the task, although this plan was not realized⁵⁴.

During the investigation altogether 139 statements were recorded, and numerous letters and letter extracts were attached as evidence. The majority of them survive in the Vatican Secret Archives and in the Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv of Vienna⁵⁵. In the end, on 13 July, 1554 the process

45 On Girolamo's actions: H. Goetz, *Nuntiatur des Girolamo Martinengo 1550–1554*, Tübingen 1965; V. Kanász, *Girolamo Martinengo apát, pápai nuncius élete és magyarországi tevékenysége*, in: *Ezerarcú Erdély. Politika, társadalom, kultúra*, ed. Á. Tötös, A. K. Markaly, G. Koloh, I. Horváth, Kolozsvár 2019, pp. 92–106.

46 ASV Misc., Arm. II, vol. 61, fol. 84r–88v.

47 ASV Misc., Arm. II, vol. 61, fol. 108v–116r.

48 ASV Misc., Arm. II, vol. 61, fol. 99r–105r.

49 ASV Misc., Arm. II, vol. 61, fol. 152v–159v.

50 ASV Misc., Arm. II, vol. 61, fol. 176r–183r.

51 ASV Misc., Arm. II, vol. 61, fol. 125v–131v.

52 E.g. ASV Misc. Arm. II, vol. 55, fol. 296r–296v; ASV Misc. Arm. II, vol. 61, fol. 21r.

53 V. Fraknói, *Magyarország egyházi...*, op. cit., pp. 82; V. Kanász, *Fráter György gyilkosságai perének forrásai...*, op. cit., pp. 174–175.

54 G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?...*, op. cit., pp. 83–84.

55 V. Kanász, *Fráter György gyilkosságai perének forrásai...*, op. cit., pp. 177–180.

was closed by Nuncio Zaccaria Delfino, Martinengo's successor, when the statements were sent to Rome⁵⁶. The statements and the attached extracts from letters were selected in a way that a reader unfamiliar with the Hungarian circumstances would find György Fráter guilty. The Pope made his decision on the basis of these documents, according to which in his bull of 4 February, 1555 he absolved King Ferdinand and his soldiers from excommunication once and for all⁵⁷.

The statements, letters and letter extracts provide an exceptional opportunity to explore not only the life of Fráter, but also Hungary's contemporary internal politics and its relations with the Habsburgs and the Ottoman Empire; besides, one can comprehend the subjects' way of thinking better and their informational channels. However, they are misleading in one regard: with some exceptions, the counts of the indictment were committed by the Monk only after Ferdinand I had sent his letter – quoted above – that authorized the murder; namely, one might assume that these deeds were not the cause of his assassination but the mistrust, fear and the lack of understanding that surrounded his persona in the court.

Summary

In conclusion, it can be stated that György Fráter's death was caused by a perception of him that spread around the country and even to the surroundings of the monarch, namely, that he was erratic and drunk with power, and his main ambition was to obtain authority over the Eastern territories. His contemporaries – partly without foundation – blamed him for the occupation of Buda in 1541, which symbolically meant the fall of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary; furthermore, his reputation was even further tarnished by his continual correspondence and diplomatic connections with the Ottomans and the welcoming of the chiausés. Although after the fall of Buda his main purpose was the union of Hungary under the Habsburgs, he had a good grip of the situation, knowing that a proper military background

56 G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?...*, op. cit., pp. 84., On Delfino's activity: H. Goetz, *Nuntiatur Delfinos, Legation Morones, Sendung Lippomanes (1554–1559)*, Tübingen 1970; G. Nemes, *Zaccaria Delfino bíboros győri adminisztrátorsága és kapcsolata Sopron várossal*, "Soproni szemle", vol. LXIV, no. 4 (2010), pp. 397–416.

57 On the letters and letter extracts, for instance: O. Utješinović, *Lebensgeschichte...*, op. cit., (Urkundenbuch) n. XVII, pp. 73–75.; G. Barta, *Vajon kié az ország?...*, op. cit., p. 194; ASV Misc. Arm. II, vol. 55, fol. 303v–304v, ASV Arch. Arcis, Arm. 1–XVIII, n. 1711, fol. 132r.

was required for that. When he saw that the Habsburg forces arriving in Transylvania were not sufficient for the defence of the province, he tried to obstruct the Ottoman vengeance. As we have seen above, this was tantamount to betrayal in the eyes of the leaders of the Habsburg troops, and so they arranged his assassination. Not only did they kill the most influential statesman of the period with this action, but they also launched a decades-long investigation which was extremely inconvenient for Ferdinand I. The murder of György Fráter led to one of the deepest crises of the Habsburg-papal relations. Finally, in 1555 the Pope absolved King Ferdinand and his soldiers from excommunication once and for all.

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Abstract

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The Anatomy of a Political Assassination: The Assassination of Cardinal György Fráter (Martinuzzi) and its Consequences

Keywords:

György Fráter (Martinuzzi), Ferdinand I, John Zápolya (I), Pope Julius III, Giovanni Battista Castaldo, Hungary, Transylvania, diplomacy, political assassination, Ottoman Empire, papacy

On 17 December 1551 on the grounds of alleged treason, soldiers of Chief Sergeant Sforza Pallavicini and Giovanni Battista Castaldo, the head of Ferdinand I's army, killed the Pauline monk, Archbishop of Esztergom, and Voivode and Governor of Transylvania, Primate György Fráter (Martinuzzi/Utyaszenich) in his castle at Alvinc.

It all happened after the monarch himself had recommended Fráter, one of the most prestigious politicians of the contemporary Kingdom of Hungary, for the red hat to Pope Julius III. This controversial act created a stir throughout the Christian world, and it had an effect on not only the subsequent history of the Kingdom of Hungary, but also on the relations between the Habsburgs and the papacy, as Ferdinand I was only temporarily absolved from excommunication. Regarding the murder, an investigation was launched headed by Nuncio Girolamo Martinengo, during which 139 statements were recorded and numerous letters and letter extracts were collected, which form a unique source collection on the relations between Hungary, the Habsburg Empire and the papacy. As well, they provide the opportunity to explore not only the life of Fráter, but also Hungary's contemporary internal politics, its relations with the Habsburgs and the Ottoman Empire, the informational channels, and finally the subjects' farming methods. The investigation was closed in 1555 with the final exoneration of Ferdinand and his soldiers. The paper introduces the reasons for the assassination, the death of György Fráter and the ensuing investigation of the Holy See.

Abstrakt

Viktor Kanász

Anatomia zamachu politycznego: zabójstwo kardynała Jerzego Utiešenovicia (Martinuzziego) i jego konsekwencje

17 grudnia 1551 r. żołnierze kondotiera Sforzy Pallaviciniego i dowódcy armii Ferdynanda I, Giovanniego Battisty Castalda, zamordowali oskarżonego o zdradę stanu paulińskiego zakonnika, Arcybiskupa Ostrzyhomia i Wojewodę oraz Gubernatora Siedmiogrodu, Prymasa Jerzego Utiešenovicia (znanego także jako Jerzy Martinuzzi lub brat Jerzy) na Zamku Alvinczy.

Do wydarzenia doszło po tym, jak sam monarcha zarekomendował brata Jerzego, jednego z najbardziej prominentnych polityków ówczesnego Królestwa Węgier, papieżowi Juliuszowi III na stanowisko kardynała. Ten kontrowersyjny czyn poruszył świat chrześcijański i miał wpływ nie tylko na dalszą historię Królestwa Węgier, ale także na relacje między Habsburgami i papieżem, ponieważ Ferdynand I jedynie tymczasowo uchronił się przed ekskomuniką. W trakcie śledztwa, prowadzonego przez Nuncjusza Girolamo Martinengo, zebrano 139 zeznań świadków oraz liczne listy i fragmenty korespondencji, które tworzą unikatowy zbiór źródeł na temat relacji między Węgrami, Cesarstwem Habsburgów i papieżem. Informacje te stanowią również okazję do zbadania nie tylko życiorysu brata Jerzego, ale także ówczesnej polityki wewnętrznej Węgier, ich relacji z Habsburgami i Imperium Osmańskim, kanałów przepływu informacji, czy nawet metod uprawy ziemi przez poddanych. Śledztwo, zamknięte w roku 1555, ostatecznie oczyściło z zarzutów Ferdynanda I oraz jego żołnierzy. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia powody dokonania zamachu, opisuje śmierć brata Jerzego oraz dochodzenie przeprowadzone przez Stolicę Apostolską.

Słowa kluczowe:

brat Jerzy (Martinuzzi), Ferdynand I, Jan Zápolya (I), papież Juliusz III, Giovanni Battista Castaldo, Węgry, Siedmiogród, dyplomacja, zamach polityczny, Imperium Osmańskie, papieżstwo