

Written Communication among the Elite of Transylvanian Society The Letter from Stephen Báthory of Șimleu to Thomas Nádasdy

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<https://doi.org/10.33993/TR.2026.1.05>

*Stephen Báthory of Șimleu's
epistle to Thomas Nádasdy
is more than a mere ex-
change of written messages
between two high nobles of
the social elite.*

IN THE first part of the 16th century, the Kingdom of Hungary experienced a turbulent period, both politically and culturally. These shifts were also evident in Transylvanian society. Against this backdrop, the use of national languages¹ in written communication increased, and private letters became a primary channel of communication among the Transylvanian elite. Vernacular writing in Transylvania remains a niche subject that has been largely overlooked in our historiography. This study, therefore, examines a private letter written in Hungarian by Stephen Báthory of Șimleu, voivode of Transylvania, and sent to Thomas Nádasdy,² the Hungarian vice-governor.

The political situation in the Kingdom of Hungary during the third and fourth decades of the 16th century could be compared to a chessboard, and the actions that took place at that time prove that the metaphor is not at all

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forced. The crushing defeat of the royal Hungarian army by Ottoman forces at the Battle of Mohács in August 1526 marked the end of the medieval Hungarian kingdom. The defeat and death of the Hungarian king paved the way for the struggle for the vacant royal throne. On one side stood the Hungarian middle nobility,³ led by the Transylvanian voivode, John Zápolya. On the basis of the Agreement of Rákos (near Pest), of 1505, which stipulated that the estates would no longer elect a foreign king, but only a king of Hungarian origin, they elected the Transylvanian voivode as king, and he was crowned in November 1526. On the other side were the pro-Habsburg faction. They, also on the basis of another agreement (the double marriage agreement signed near Vienna in 1506 between the Habsburgs and the Jagiellonians), had the right to lay claim to the Hungarian royal throne. Therefore, after the defeat at Mohács, the Kingdom of Hungary had two pretenders to the throne. They waged a war for supremacy, and the period from 1526 to 1538, from the battle of Mohács to the Peace of Oradea (Nagyvárad, Großwardein), can be described as an “internal war.”⁴

Ferdinand of Habsburg, the brother of the widowed queen of Hungary, left Vienna for the Kingdom of Hungary to claim the throne, invoking the aforementioned agreement. This action effectively annulled the Agreement of Rákos and, by extension, invalidated the coronation of John Zápolya.

In early 1527, Ferdinand gathered an army and launched an attack against John Zápolya, capturing the cities of western Hungary and then the capital, Buda, from which King John had fled. By the end of the same year, under pressure from the pro-Habsburg faction within the kingdom, Ferdinand was also crowned King of Hungary. The key difference between the two rival kings lay in their external support—but that same support also posed the greatest threat: the Ottoman Empire. In contrast to Ferdinand of Habsburg, John Zápolya had the support of the Sultan,⁵ who at the time acted like a master chess player, shifting pieces from one side of the board to the other at will. He “arranged” the political landscape to suit his ambitions, particularly his goal of capturing Vienna. The Sultan attempted to seize the capital of the Holy Roman Empire in both 1529 and 1532,⁶ but ultimately failed.

Meanwhile, John Zápolya withdrew to Transylvania, where he attempted to consolidate his position by sending an envoy to Istanbul to request military assistance. Within the intra-Carpathian region, many nobles and the Szekler population supported him—though the Saxons were, in fact, Ferdinandists. The tensions brewing beyond the Tisza River soon spilled into Transylvania. The envoy sent by John Zápolya returned from Istanbul with concrete promises of military support from the Sultan. In this context, the Venetian Aloisio Gritti was sent to Hungary. From the Sultan’s perspective, Gritti was expected to assist John Zápolya in securing his rule.

Aloisio Gritti arrived in Hungary at the beginning of 1528. At that time, most of the territory was under Ferdinand's control, but, with Ottoman support, John Zápolya began to reclaim the regions previously lost to the Habsburgs. In Transylvania, tensions between the supporters of the two rival kings culminated in the Battle of Feldioara (Barcaföldvár, Marienburg) in 1529, where the army led by Moldavian voivode Petru Rareș—an ally of John Zápolya—defeated the pro-Habsburg forces. Attention then turned to the fortress of Buda, where Ferdinandist troops were under the command of Thomas Nádasdy, an undeclared pro-Habsburg who was more committed to preserving the integrity of the kingdom than to backing a particular claimant to the throne.

In general, the Hungarian nobles⁷ offered their support to either Ferdinand of Habsburg or John Zápolya based on their own interests—primarily financial and territorial. However, it became clear to many that neither monarch was strong enough to decisively defeat the other or to eliminate the Ottoman threat; in fact, quite the opposite occurred. Out of fear of the Ottoman advance—or perhaps due to his own political weakness—King John agreed to increase the Sultan's influence within the Kingdom of Hungary by appointing Aloisio Gritti as governor. Meanwhile, Thomas Nádasdy, who had been taken prisoner in Buda and subsequently shifted his allegiance to John Zápolya, was appointed deputy governor. This appointment was made with the consent of Ferdinand of Habsburg, likely in order to prevent Nádasdy from being accused of treason.

In those tense times, written communication was essential—not only for maintaining private relationships but also for staying informed about political developments. This brings us to the topic of private correspondence, which, due to the political instability as well as religious and cultural developments (such as the Protestant Reformation, which encouraged writing in national languages), increasingly began to be conducted in Hungarian. It should be noted, however, that most letters continued to be written in Latin,⁸ although the number of Hungarian-language letters gradually increased during this period. One example from this context is a letter sent by Stephen Báthory of Șimleu,⁹ ruler of Transylvania between 1529 and 1534, to Thomas Nádasdy, the Hungarian vice-governor. This letter is part of a corpus of 131 preserved Hungarian-language letters written between 1531 and 1540—the decade in which it was drafted. While this number is not large, it is far from insignificant, especially when compared to the 53 Hungarian letters preserved from the previous decade (1521–1530) and the more than 2,200 letters from the following decade (1541–1549).

The text signed by the Transylvanian voivode was written on paper. The first notable aspect is its length: the letter contains a total of 36 lines. It can be classified as a medium-length epistle—some letters from the period were only a few lines long, while others covered several pages. The writing is clear and neat: the

lines are straight, there are no erasures or additions, and the content is accessible. However, this does not necessarily mean that the letter is easy to read or understand—especially from a modern reader’s perspective. This difficulty is likely due to the fact that the text is written in Old Hungarian¹⁰ and also makes use of various abbreviations typical of the Latin language. While Latin writing followed established conventions and was supported by numerous manuals from which literate individuals could learn proper style and grammar, no such standardized rules existed for Hungarian in the 16th century or immediately thereafter. As a result, each literate person wrote Hungarian according to personal preference, often applying Latin grammatical and stylistic norms to the vernacular.¹¹

AS A RULE, an epistle¹² was expected to include five parts: *salutatio*, *benevolentiae captatio*, *narratio*, *petitio*, and *conclusio*, along with the date and the sender’s signature. The text under analysis contains all of these elements. *Salutatio*: In the first line of the text, which is written in Latin, the sender—Voivode Stephen Báthory of Șimleu—expresses his gratitude to the recipient, Thomas Nádasdy, who was both his hierarchical superior and a close friend. These professional and personal ties are reflected in the formula of address: *Magnifice domine frater carissime premissa salute ac mei commendationem* (“Most noble lord, dearest brother, first of all, my greetings and gratitude”).

Next comes the *captatio benevolentiae*, which begins in the following line. From this point, the letter continues in Hungarian, with the writer aiming to win the goodwill of the recipient through a warm and cordial statement:

*erthem azt hogh The k Megh Thert az Tweljigisbowl es az Jgaz zerzetben ewltew-
zewt kyt Bizonyi Jgen ewrewlewkw, agjia isten The k Jdvestsigire es Thiztessigire es
Minden alapatodnak ewregbewlisire*

*I understand that Your Grace has turned away from error and has committed
himself to the true order, which brings me great joy. May God grant it for your
salvation and honor, and for the eternal prosperity of your entire estate.*

The letter appears to be a reply to an earlier message in which the voivode was informed about an important event in Thomas Nádasdy’s private life, or perhaps he learned of it through other sources. Regardless, the Transylvanian nobleman expresses happiness and congratulates the high nobleman on his engagement. Interestingly, the letter does not use the specific term “betrothal.” Instead, it employs more figurative expressions—such as “you have returned from your wanderings and have put on the garments of truth.” These phrases are ambiguous¹³ and open to interpretation. For instance, Elemér Mályusz,

who has studied the letters in the Nádasdy family archive, argues that the “return from wandering” should not be understood as a religious metaphor, but rather as having political significance.

As mentioned earlier, Thomas Nádasdy was initially a supporter of King Ferdinand.¹⁴ In 1529, while serving as the Ferdinandist captain of Buda, he was captured by the supporters of John Zápolya. Later, in exchange for his release, he shifted his allegiance and sided with Zápolya. Thus, between 1529 and 1534, Nádasdy supported King John, although he made several attempts to return to the Habsburg sphere of influence. In 1530, he was appointed treasurer of the royal court, and the following year he became vice-governor of Hungary. His relationship with the governor, Aloisio Gritti, was strained,¹⁵ which may have prompted his attempts to revert to his original allegiance. However, by 1532, he abandoned this idea. Elemér Mályusz suggests that Nádasdy’s decision to continue supporting John Zápolya was the correct course, while his initial support for Ferdinand was the wrong one. Furthermore, the Báthory family of Șimleu—including Stephen (IV) Báthory, who was Transylvanian voivode during the early 1530s—were unwavering supporters of King John. The engagement between Thomas Nádasdy and Orsolya Kanizsai also took place in 1532, which may explain the ambiguity of the phrase “going astray.” Nádasdy’s decision to marry could symbolize his “return to the right path,” suggesting that through his engagement, he had finally “put on the garments of truth.”

Returning to the letter under analysis, the *benevolentiae captatio* is four lines long. Without any further break in the flow of the text, the *narratio* continues:

Your relative, the mother [Ana Drágffy] of your consort [Orsolya Kanizsai]¹⁶ has gone to Somogy County with my son-in-law, Gáspár Drágffy,¹⁷ for which I am very glad, though I regret being far away.

The *narratio* is brief—only four lines—unlike the typical letters of the period, in which the *narratio* was the longest part, while the *petitio* (petition) was short. In this case, the situation is reversed: the author provides few details and, in just a few lines, briefly presents the information he has about the family—or future family—of the nobleman, simply in order to inform him.

As a rule, the component parts of an epistle continue without any clear demarcation or distinguishing marks. This results in a certain flow of the written text, which is not necessarily a positive feature—especially from the perspective of today’s reader, who is accustomed to modern conventions of letter writing. In this letter, the *petitio* segment is the longest, spanning nearly eleven lines. In it, the voivode makes two requests:

*Our country is whole, but I believe that true and devoted friendship is also whole and undivided. I beg you—as I have always intended from the beginning, and even now I ask you not to have any doubts about me—to allow me to speak in the matter of the Franciscan monk, so that I may bring him justice, alms at last. You live near Germany; therefore, I beg you to bring me a good suit of armor for 50 florins—or 60 florins, if necessary—and I will pay the price, as I would for a brother. And if you must add anything above the price, etc.*¹⁸

The first request concerns the situation of a Franciscan monk—a Minorite—in whose case the voivode asks the high dignitary to trust him to resolve the matter. The second request is of a more unusual nature: he asks Thomas Nádasdy to do him a favor by bringing a good suit of armor from the German regions, arguing that Nádasdy lives closer to them. He also specifies the budget within which the purchase should fall—50 or 60 florins—and promises to repay the amount, as one would to a brother, adding something extra if necessary. This friendly tone highlights the personal and private character of the letter. In addition to these personal matters, the epistle also touches upon political issues. The shift between the personal and political sections is marked by a new paragraph, even though the preceding line does not end with a full stop. In fact, none of the sentences in this section end with a full stop; a comma might have served as a demarcation mark, but even so, the sentences tend to blend together. Periods are generally used for abbreviations, most commonly in forms such as *.k.* (for *kegyelmed*—“your grace”) or *.L.* (for 50 florins). It is also worth noting that the author frequently places the vowel *h* after certain consonants—*t, d, g, c*—resulting in spellings such as *th, dh, gh, ch* (e.g., *erthem* “I understand,” *Megh Thert* “you have turned”). This suggests a trace of orality in the writing. Additionally, vowels such as *ö, ő, á, é,* and *ó*—which are present in modern Hungarian—are notably absent from the text, indicating differences in the orthographic convention of that time.

Thus, the author—like others writing in Hungarian at the time—had to develop alternative orthographic strategies to approximate the sounds of spoken language. This necessity contributed to the distinctly oral character of written Hungarian in that period. A representative example is the word *Twelygishewl*, which in modern Hungarian would be spelled *tévelygésből* (“from wandering” or “from straying”). The expression recalls the phrase “you have returned from wandering, from the wrong path,” traditionally used in the context of engagement or personal matters. Since accented vowels were not yet in use, writers employed creative substitutes. For instance, the letter *j̇* (y with a colon) was often used in place of *i* or *j*, while the vowel *ő* was represented by the combination *ew*.

These orthographic choices illustrate the evolving nature of Hungarian spelling and the influence of phonetic transcription on early written forms.

Throughout the text, many words begin with a capital letter even when they are not proper nouns, while in other instances, proper names are not capitalized as would be required by modern writing conventions. Additionally, there are cases where two words that should have been written separately appear as a single word, and conversely, instances where a single word is incorrectly split into two. These are just some of the inconsistencies that can be identified in the Hungarian writing of the 16th century.

Returning to the epistle, we see that the paragraph separating the two segments of the text is not a continuation of the first part but rather the beginning of a new *narratio*, as if two epistles were combined into one letter. It continues:

News about Hungary I cannot write to you, because you know the situation better than I do. As for Transylvania, the Szeklers have promised to pay dues to the Governor, but it is understood that they will do so with difficulty. As for the Sibiu townspeople, although we have tried to exert pressure, we have not yet succeeded in convincing them. The loyal Saxons have promised to provide the Governor of Transylvania with aid amounting to 50 units—4,000 florins. There is no other news at the moment.

In nearly nine lines, the Transylvanian voivode conveys the most relevant political information concerning the region he governs. It is worth noting that, in the case of both the Szeklers and the loyal Saxons—*az hűvzások* (possibly *hű szászok*, meaning “loyal Saxons”)—the ruler mentions money: both Transylvanian populations promised the governor funds, either as gifts or aid. It was this monetary aspect, alongside the thirst for power, that ultimately led to the murder of Governor Aloisio Gritti.¹⁹ The Saxons of Sibiu (Nagyszeben, Hermannstadt), who were loyal neither to the voivode nor to King John but were supporters of Ferdinand,²⁰ were pressured to recognize the supremacy of John Zápolya, though according to the text these efforts yielded no result. The narrative ends abruptly mid-line, noting that there is no further news, with a comma transitioning into yet another petition that Stephen Báthory of Şimleu addressed to Thomas Nádasdy:

I think that I cannot go to our lord [King John Zápolya] now; therefore, I beg you, when you are there, to convey to him all our matters of interest, including that of the son-in-law Drágffy.

The Transylvanian dignitary thus asked the vice-governor, upon meeting the monarch, to pass on all matters concerning both the voivode and his son-in-law.

As a form of symmetry, the epistle concludes with various formulas written in Latin, mirroring the opening line of the letter's address:

In Quo non difido Quem vnacum domina consorthe eiusdem Bene Valere Cupio et ad Tempus vnacum liberis etc ex Somlyo In festo visitacionis sanctissime virginis Marie 1532.

Additional details regarding the place and year of writing are also included—*Somlyo* (modern-day Șimleu) and the date, which, following customary practice, is linked to a religious feast day: 2 July 1532, the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Beneath the text appears the acronym *E V M*—*Eiusdem Vestre Magnificencie* (“Your Magnificence”)—followed by the signature *frater ac amicus Bathorj vayvoda Transsilvanensis* (“brother and friend Bathorj, Voivode of Transylvania,” etc.). Nowhere in the text do we find expressions such as *manu propria* or *en magam kezemvel*, which are typically present in holograph letters. Therefore, it is assumed that the sender was Stephen Báthory of Șimleu, but the actual author was likely a scribe of the voivode. However, we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that the letter was penned by the Transylvanian dignitary himself.

The sheet was folded in two or four, and in the blank space the addressee was written: *Magnifico domino Thome Nadasdj domino fratrique ac amico Meo Carissimo*,²¹ since at that time envelopes were not used in written correspondence.

Stephen Báthory of Șimleu's epistle to Thomas Nádasdy is more than a mere exchange of written messages between two high nobles of the social elite. The voivode's letter includes both professional and private information, from which we can discern the political developments that took place in Transylvania during the early 16th century. More importantly, however, the text functions as a social bond that sustains their friendship, conveying various sentiments such as respect, camaraderie, and attachment.

ANNEX

TRANSCRIPTION:

Magniffice domine frater karissime premissa salute ac Mei commendacionem, erthem azt hogh The k Megh Thert az Twelygisebwel es az Jgaz zerzetben ewltewzewt kyt *Bizonj* Jgen ewrewlewkw, agya isten The k Jdvessigire es Thiztessigire es Minden alapodnak ewregbewlisire, Jmmar .k. somogj Tewrvmben fayfokom Ment azonyanak

az.k. Tarsanak az annja atjafj gyermek ez en fjamval dragfij gaspval, eztes Jgen akarom es ewrewlewm csak ezt Banom hogh Mezze vagyok, az hazank egbe de Megh ezt gondolom hogh azhwl az hyv es Jgaz Baratsagh vagyon egbe nem Mezze kire en The k eleytewlfogvan ayanlottam Magamat Mostes, kiben The k sinczen ketsigem, Jmmar had zolyak cherj Barat Thewrvnyben hozyam alamisnara az vigit, k kewzel lakyk nimet orzaghoz azjrt k kirem hogh The k hozasson egh yo pancilt en nekem vagh .L. foriton vagh LX forinton hozyak de k Megh kewldewm az arrat annak felette Mint atjamfyanak esmegh valamit rejam wec Mindennel etc

Vysagot Magyar orzagit k nem Jrok Mert k azt Joban Tugya nalamnal erdelj ez hogh az zekelyek adot Jgirtek wolt gubernator vramnak kyt wgh erthek hogh nehezen fogjak Megh adnj az zebenyeket valaztigen gyetretyewk Mindenel de Megh Semmj Jamborsagra nem vehettewk erdelj orzag gubernator vramnak .L. pinz segycziget ada az hyvzazok iijm forintot egyeb vysagunk Most ninchen, en vilem hogh en Most vrunkhoz nem Mehetek ha Mikort k oth [lez]en k commdalom Mind dragfj fjamval egbe Minnden dolgunkat, Jn Quo non difido Quem vnacum domina consorthe eiusdem Bene Valere Cupio et ad Tempus vnacum liberis etc ex somlyo Jn festo visitacionis sanctissime virginis Marie 1532

E V M (Eiusdem Vestre Magnificencie) frater ac amicus Bathorj vayvoda Transsilvanensis etc



Notes

1. László Solymosi, “Anyanyelv és jogi írásbeliség a középkori Magyarországon,” *Történelmi Szemle* (Budapest) 53, 4 (2011): 479–501. The first known document written in German in Transylvania dates back to 1411. It is a receipt attesting to a debt owed by a Transylvanian named Martin Chraus to a citizen of Vienna for goods he had purchased. However, the use of written German in the Kingdom of Hungary began much earlier. For example, German-language documents are known from the mid-14th century in Sopron and Bratislava, where German became an official language toward the end of the 14th century, gradually reducing the dominance of Latin. This marked the beginning of a gradual process in which Latin was increasingly replaced by German, particularly in the western parts of the Hungarian Kingdom. This shift would expend to the eastern regions as well, albeit with a delay of about a century.
2. Árpád Károlyi and József Szalay, *Nádasdy Tamás nádor családi levelezése* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1882), 3–28; Mályusz Elemér, “Az Országos Levéltár Nádasdy-levéltárának magyar levelei, 1531–49,” *Levéltári Közlemények* (Budapest) 1, 1–2 (1923): 126–149; József Bessenyei, *A Nádasdyak* (Budapest: General Press, 2005), 5–39; Pál Ács, “Alvise Gritti és Nádasdy Tamás—egy elhidegült barátság történeti háttere,” in *Művészet és mesterség—Tiszteltető kötet R. Várkonyi Ágnes emlékére*, ed. Ildikó Horn and Gábor Várkonyi (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2016), 133–147; István

- Bariska, “A Nádasdy család és az 1532. évi oszmán-török hadjárat,” in *Vási szemle* (Szombathely) 1, 72 (2018): 48–63.
3. Géza Pálffy, *A tizenhatodik század története*, vol. VI, ed. Gyula Szvák (Budapest: Pan-nonica, 2000), 5–101.
 4. Gábor Barta, *Az Erdélyi Fejedelemség születése* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1979), 8–71; Anton Dörner, “Transilvania între stabilitate și criză,” in *Istoria Transilvaniei*, vol. I (*până la 1541*), ed. Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Nágler, and Magyari András (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2007), 324–326.
 5. Călin Felezeu, “Cadrul politic internațional (1541–1699),” in *Istoria Transilvaniei*, vol. II (*de la 1541 până la 1711*), ed. Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Nágler, and Magyari András (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2007), 14–17.
 6. Bariska, 48–63.
 7. Géza Pálffy, *Hungary between Two Empires 1526–1711*, transl. David Robert Evans (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021), *passim*.
 8. Albert Berger, *Urkunden-Regesten aus dem Archiv der Stadt Bistritz in Siebenbürgen*, vol. I–III, ed. Ernst Wagner (Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau, 1986–1995), *apud*. Mária Lupescu Makó, “Lingua franca—Lingua materna: Limbi și comunități în orașele medievale din Transilvania,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “G. Barițiu”* (Cluj-Napoca) 58 (2019): 11–31. For example, according to the statistics on the documents preserved in the Bistrița city archive for the period 1203–1570, a total of 3,677 documents were recorded. The majority (82%) were written in Latin, 11% in German, and only 7% in Hungarian. It was not until the mid-16th century that the number of Hungarian-language documents began to increase; however, even then, they represented only 2% of the 542 documents dated between 1541 and 1550. For the subsequent decade, from 1551 to 1560, 615 documents were preserved, during which the ratio of documents written in Hungarian rose to 9%, equaling those written in German, though the majority remained in Latin.
 9. Attila Hegedűs, Lajos Papp, *Középkori leveleink 1541-ig* (Budapest: Tankönyv Kiadó, 1991), doc. 109, 246–248.
 10. Andor Tarnai, “*A magyar nyelvet írni kezdik*”: *Irodalmi gondolkodás a középkori Magyarországon* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984), 229, 236–238. Before the 15th–16th centuries there was a boundary between orality and writing. Over time, there emerged a certain natural evolution towards a symbiosis between the Latin and Hungarian languages, reaching the stage where a litteratus could communicate in writing in the language he spoke. However, the medieval Hungarian language used in writing was not a court or ecclesiastical language, because it had many nuances of everyday language. Still, it cannot be called a common language either, because only a small number of intellectuals, mainly those who held a position in society, could write in Hungarian. At the turn of the 15th–16th centuries there was a large group of litterati for whom Hungarian was the dominant language. Before the end of the 15th century the number of writings in Hungarian might have been higher if, for example, ecclesiastical members had written down their sermons in Hungarian or if communications between monks had been in writing rather than verbal. Fur-

thermore, if the book-literate nobility had not delegated the drafting of documents related to written communication to scribes or translators, but had penned them personally, this might have contributed to the proliferation of Hungarian-language texts. The literate class, although educated in Latin and using it in educational and social contexts, did not disregard their vernacular. On the contrary, they sought to elevate the Hungarian language, striving to bring it to parity with the Latin they mastered.

11. Sigismund Jakó and Radu Manolescu, *Scrierea latină în Evul Mediu* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1971), *passim*; Jakó Zsigmond, *Írás, könyv, értelmiség—Tanulmányok Erdély történelméhez* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1976), 10–37; Nándor Várkonyi, *Az írás és a könyv története* (Budapest: 2001), 351–360.
12. Susana Andea, “Aspecte privind scrierea epistolară din Transilvania (sec. XIV–XVII),” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “G. Barițiu”* (Cluj-Napoca) 58 (2019): 33–55.
13. Mályusz, 126–149.
14. Bessenyei, 5–39.
15. Ács, 133–147.
16. Iván Nagy, *Magyarország családai czimerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal*, vol. VIII (Pest: Ráth Mór, 1861), 14–24; Sándor Payr, “Kanizsai Orsolya főrangú magyar nő a XVI. századból. Élet- és jellemrajz,” *Egyházunk nagyjai* (Budapest) 13, 8 (1908): 1–34. Orsolya Kanizsai (1521–1571), the future wife of Thomas Nádasdy, was the daughter of Ladislaus Kanizsai, the Count (or Comes) of Vas County, and Ana Drágffy of Beltiug (near present-day Satu Mare). Her maternal grandparents were from Transylvania; her grandfather, Bartholomew Drágffy of Beltiug, Count of Solnoc, served as Voivode of Transylvania from 1493 to 1499. After the deaths of her father and brothers, Orsolya Kanizsai became the sole heir to the vast noble estate of the Kanizsai family. In 1532, the Hungarian king, invoking the royal privilege of granting inheritance rights to a nobleman’s daughter in the absence of male heirs (Hungarian: *fiúsitás*, Latin: *praefectio*), officially recognized Orsolya Kanizsai as the rightful heir. That same year, she became engaged to Thomas Nádasdy.
17. Nagy, *Magyarország családai czimerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal*, vol. I (Pest: Fribeisz István, 1857), 216–224. Stephen (IV) Báthory of Șimleu (1477–1534) served as vice-voivode of Transylvania from 1523, and in 1529 he was appointed voivode by King John Zápolya. That same year, he also became the father-in-law of Gáspár Drágffy, who married his daughter, Anna Báthory. Gáspár Drágffy held the office of Count (or Comes) of Kraszna (Crasna) and Inner-Szolnok (Solnocul de Mijloc) counties.
18. Hegedűs and Papp, doc. 109, 246–248.
19. Ács, 133–147.
20. József Bessenyei, “Ferdinánd király és a magyarországi arisztokrácia, különös tekintettel Ferdinánd pártjának kialakulására (1526–1540),” *Történelmi Szemle* (Budapest) 45, 1–2 (2003): 93–107.
21. Hegedűs and Papp, doc. 109, 246–248.

Abstract

Written Communication among the Elite of Transylvanian Society: The Letter from Stephen Báthory of Șimleu to Thomas Nádasdy

In the first part of the 16th century, the Kingdom of Hungary experienced a turbulent period, both politically and culturally. These shifts were also evident in Transylvanian society. Against this backdrop, the use of national languages in written communication increased, and private letters became a primary channel of communication among the Transylvanian elite. Vernacular writing in Transylvania remains a niche subject that has been largely overlooked in our historiography. This study, therefore, examines a private letter written in Hungarian by Stephen Báthory of Șimleu, voivode of Transylvania, and sent to Thomas Nádasdy, the Hungarian vice-governor. Stephen Báthory of Șimleu's epistle to Thomas Nádasdy is more than a mere exchange of written messages between two high nobles. The voivode's letter includes both professional and private information, from which we can discern the political developments that took place in Transylvania during the early 16th century. More importantly, however, the text functions as a social bond that sustains their friendship, conveying various sentiments such as respect, camaraderie, and attachment.

Keywords

Transylvania, Hungarian language, written communication