

THESES OF PHD DISSERTATION

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**A HIGH PRIEST POLITICIAN IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 16TH
CENTURY
THE CAREER OF ARCHBISHOP OF ESZTERGOM AND GOVERNOR-
GENERAL, PÁL VÁRDAY**

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I. Significance of choice of topic, aim of the research

Hungarian history writing treated Pál Várday, the Archbishop of Esztergom (1526-1549) and governor-general (1542-1549), who was one of the main characters of Post-Mohács Hungarian history unfairly. Accordingly, his biographical details are sometimes inaccurate and incomplete and often contradictory. Out of the biographies written about Várday, we can distinguish those which were written in the 18th century by Miklós Schmitth on the life of the archbishops of Esztergom, and the bishops of Eger. Following the entry in Ferenc Budai's encyclopaedia, his life was summed up by István Sugár's work, titled "*Az egri püspökök története*".

This is really surprising, because regarding his positions only, he should have been given more attention as a politician and high priest. During his long and rich career, Pál Várday reached the top of both the secular and the ecclesiastical hierarchy and when he passed away, he died as Archbishop of Esztergom and governor-general. Still, based on the hitherto revealed historical sources, we can not even determine with absolute certainty, where this Archbishop of Esztergom-governor-general was buried. According to the chronicle of his contemporary archbishop and successor governor, Miklós Oláh, Archbishop of Esztergom, Pál Várday died on 12th October 1549 at the age of 66 in Bratislava (Pozsony) and was buried there. Historiographer Miklós Istvánffy however, half a century later was concerned that his body was transported to Trnava (Nagyszombat), where it was placed inside a simple grave which was prepared in great haste. His gravestone has remained to us neither in Bratislava nor in Trnava.

At the time of his death Pál Várday, who was born in a gentry family in Somogy County, was one of the most distinguished lords of the Kingdom of Hungary. To what did he owe this remarkable, though not unprecedented (just remember László Szalkai) career? No narratives or major architectural monuments have remained after him, nor did his family rise up to the aristocracy. His memory seems having been erased. Why is that? Is it possible, that sources are really silent on the politician who has been in such a significant position for so long? Why do not we know more about him and his career? Even if they keep silent on the person, they should write about the official, the high-priest. It is fact that no individual archive fonds belonging to him or his family have survived. Where can those resources be found which take us closer to him?

During his career, Paul Várday was treasurer, bishop, then archbishop and governor. For this reason, his work can be uncovered primarily through his positions. In other words, dossiers

in the fonds and archives of Várday's contemporaries and fellow politicians had to be examined. And near the end of his life, Várday became a governor-general. The 16th century vicegerency (*locumtenentia*) reached the climax of its development under Archbishop of Esztergom, Pál Várday, not only regarding its competence, but also with regard to its organization. It became an office permanently in session and making decisions as a body. This concordant opinion is emerging from the not too many elaborations on the governor's institute. Although the temptation was great, my goal could not be the complete elaboration of Várday's work as a governor. To do this, legal, military, and economic history, etc. aspects should also have been thoroughly examined, which is much more, than what this present study is aimed to, namely, to present a biography or more precisely, a career. However, I do not want to disregard this institution-historical aspect either. What did I undertake to do then? Based on the sources I examined, I made an attempt to make the governor-general (and previously treasurer, bishop and archbishop) roles of Várday shaded and to explore the political space in which he could act as a governor-general.

II. Collecting material, methodology

Although the Pre-Mohács Archives have a number of provenances, they can be researched in one place, and with the help of a database this process is relatively easy: in the Medieval collection (Archives of Diplomats and Photographic Collection) of the National Archives of Hungary (hereafter MOL), which is also available online since 2010. Out of the 293 Pre-Mohács diplomas I examined, 140 were issued by Várday. The "virtual fond reconstruction" for the Post-Mohács period is much more difficult. It is a very meticulous and time consuming work, taking into account that archives of the first half of the 16th century, mostly in Hungary, have undergone a terrible destruction, so only a few and uncollected documents have survived in these archives from this period. In addition, these archives, beyond the fact that can not be found in one place, with few exceptions, can only be searched by looking at documents one by one.

Regarding the activities of the Archbishop of Esztergom, a great number of documents can be found in the archives of the Chapter of Esztergom as well. Unfortunately, no aids are available to these, so I had to do with that part of Primate Archives which had aids already, which is the *Archivum Saeculare Acta Radicalia* series. Of course, I also researched Várday's fond fragment, which is in the *Archivum Ecclesiasticum Vetus*, under the serial number 82. Naturally,

examining the archives of the chapter will be inevitable in the future, although it will be a very time consuming research, for the meantime I have to do with the documents issued sporadically.

The most important, interdependent file related to the governor role of Várday is known only from publication. This was published by István Kiss Rugonfalvi in the work titled "*A magyar helytartótanács I. Ferdinánd korában és 1549–51. évi leveles könyve*". According to István Kiss's own narrative, the letter-book was discovered by him in 1903 in the archives of the Héderváry family. The manuscript is divided into two distinct parts. The first part contains a part of the letters of the vicegerency written between 13th January 1549 and 6th February 1551, while, the second part contains the letters written in the name of Ferdinand I by the Hungarian Court Chancellery, operant beside the ruler and Frederico Malatesta's royal personal, that is to say, royal prescripts from between 1552 and 1556. Árpád Károlyi has already affirmed that the first part is the official copy book of the vicegerency. That was why, he assumed that the original copies of the transcripts can be found in the famous *Hungarica* collection of *Haus-, Hof-und Staatsarchiv* (hereinafter HHStA), which is a collection of files about Hungarian related writers. When comparing the entries of the letter-books with the original documents, the results were very interesting. Only two of the copies had its original in the archives. They have already noticed the value of the codex earlier; it has even been copied in the 18th century several times. These can probably be traced back to the copies of Márton György Kovachich's copies from the year 1798.

As opposed to the letter-book, the 5-volume series, titled "*Egyháztörténelmi emlékek a magyarországi hitújítás korából*", published between 1902 and 1912 by Vince Bunyitay, János Karácsonyi, Ferenc Kollányi and József Lukcsics included several papers from the mentioned *Hungarica* series of the HHStA. For my dissertation, I examined the 1526-1549 period, i.e. bundles 2 to 55 of this great collection. I researched these documents mainly in the microfilm library of MOL (MFW 283–298, W 333–341, W 645–652). I closely examined a total of 627 pieces, of which only 175 fall into the governor's period (1543-1549). I know 49 additional sources from the HHStA Turcica series on Várday's activity. The 139 papers of the letter-book are added to this from the time Várday served as a governor (1549).

These files, however, are one-sided from several points of view. Most of them are letters between the governor (or his council) and the ruler. The governor has maintained close relations with the counties, towns and places of authentication (*loca credibilia*). Unfortunately however, the archives of counties and towns have hardly preserved anything from this period.

The *Palatinalia* series of the municipal archives of Bratislava, Trnava (*Magistrat mesta Trnavy*) preserved letters of palatines, governor-generals and chief judges (regional judges, secretaries, palatine-governors, chancellors). The addressee is not always the city of Trnava, we also find letters addressed to counties for example, mostly originals. This collection also has a fair number of Várday-letters from the period between 1543 and 1549, a total of 104 pieces. Moreover, 86 of these are original. Their examination gives further interesting conclusions; in addition, many of the governor's servitors' names have been preserved. R. Kiss also used the Archives of Sopron in his work. He also borrowed several files. Some of these however were not returned, so in these cases, I relied only on indirect historian data. And in the case of the State Archives of Bratislava which has long been under reconstruction, I used the registers published by Vladimír Horváth.

Archives at places of authentication contain a countless number of contemporary sources. Their exploitation is still pending. Several people have been working on the documentary material of the places of authentication, yet their operation and files from after 1526 are practically still unexplored, they have barely been systematically checked. Only the registers of the convents at Zalavár and Kapornak were published in care of Irén Bilkei (1527-1548). During my research I examined only those which were written after 1543.

Out of the great number of registers of the Hungarian Court Chamber I researched primarily Archives of the Hungarian Chamber. Of these, in most cases I could use the letters of the Nádasdy family archives (E 185). The letter-book of György Fráter has also been published from the Archives of the Hungarian Chamber in 1893, which was proved to be "an unorganized fragment of Pál Várday's letter-book and envoy's directions and statements, written for an unknown reason". Countless documents and valuable data are hidden in the MOL family archives as well. At least, this is suggested by randomly found data. (In this context, I could not undertake the full exploration.)

All in all – at the moment – I know nearly seven hundred, exactly 694 documents written after 29th August 1526, which were signed by Pál Várday. (These, of course, do not include the files written under the names of both governor, István Báthory and Elek Thurzó, and these are likely to have been sealed by Várday, too.) The preparation of Várday's itinerary – for the very reasons of length – was not realized; this will be accomplished in the book version of this dissertation. It is interesting to note however, that out of the aforementioned significant number

of letters, 510 were written between 1543 and 1549. The place of origin of these documents is also interesting. 469 out of 694 were written in Bratislava, 441 of these after 1543. It is obvious, however, that the disclosure is not complete (though, this can not be complete in case of such dispersed records), but these have been enough to outline the career of Archbishop of Esztergom - governor-general and its main characteristics.

III. Main results of the research

Pál Várday started his exceptionally long and meaningful career – much before Mohács – in the royal treasury, where he worked for an exceptionally long time, from the end of 1512 until the end of 1524 and almost without interruption, first as vice-treasurer, then as *administrator* being the practical controller of the treasury, and finally, as the actual leader, i.e. treasurer. In the exploration of his treasury activities, I could count on the results of András Kubinyi's work, but I also managed to enrich our knowledge with several new data and statement as a result of the systematic examination of diplomas from the Middle Ages – not only about Várday's activities, but also the functioning of the Treasury. In addition, I managed to discover a (so far largely unknown) part of the treasurer's family, which puts the analyzed events into a socio-historical perspective and framework. It is of particular concern that many of Várday's treasury associates played a significant role after Mohács too. For example, both Ferenc Kisserényi and Tamás Kamarjay have started their career beside him.

In addition to becoming an excellent economic expert during his long service, he was also well aware of the the legal customs in Hungary, since, on the one hand, his activities as an attorney can be shown in Somogy county, and, on the other hand, he was a member of the committee responsible for investigating István Werbőczy's Tripartitum in 1514. Parallel to his treasury responsibilities, his ecclesiastical career progressed as well. He was the provost of the St. Sigmund Collegiate Chapter in Buda between 1511 and 1520. Certainly, he gained this position as a result of a treasurer payment, that is, as a special funding from the ruler, just as we have to suspect with his later received bishop title.

As Bishop of Veszprém (1520–1524) and Eger (1524–1526), Várday participated in the thunderous years of political battles preceding the Battle of Mohács. He is often seen around one or the other interest group. In 1525, Papai Nuncio, Antonio de Burgio saw him as "ruling" the country with Sárkány Ambrus Várday and László Szalkai. Even if it was not true in all respects,

it is fact, that even on the eve of the Battle of Mohács he was an outstanding and distinguished figure of the Hungarian political elite, who, if had been lost in the Battle of Mohács – like many bishop fellows of him – would still have left a significant career behind.

On command of the ruler, the Bishop of Eger could not participate in the Battle of Mohács. As a result of the death of the Archbishop of Esztergom and Kalocsa, several bishops and lords, the surviving Várday became – with István Báthory and camerarius Elek Thurzó – at one blow, one of the most experienced politicians of the country. The news of defeat reached him in Buda. From there, however, he did not follow the escaping Queen Mária to Bratislava, but immediately began to organize to protect his diocese. On 14th October 1526, he is already in Tokaj, in the camp of János Szapolyai, Voivode of Transylvania. This also explains why the invitation to the King Election Meeting was signed by Bishop of Eger, Pál Várday right after Szapolyai. Later, on 11th November 1526, he also attended the coronation of King János in Székesfehérvár. The new ruler appointed him as Archbishop of Esztergom on 15th November, and then, on 1st January 1527, he was also donated the *ius supremi patronatus* in his diocese. Várday later also swore allegiance to King Ferdinand I, who was crowned on 16th December 1526 in Bratislava. With reward to this, Ferdinand I also appointed him as Archbishop of Esztergom, and not much later, he made Várday his chief chancellor. Várday was consecrated bishop only after papal confirmation, so that he could not participate neither in the coronation of János, nor in the one of Ferdinand. Thus, contrary to the later common historian belief, none of the post-1526 Hungarian rulers were crowned by Várday, but the senior ordained bishop, Bishop of Nyitra, István Podmaniczky.

The Pope attained Várday as Archbishop of Esztergom on 4th February 1529. In the absence of an opposed candidate, it was easier for him to obtain the position of archbishop, than to keep it. The Lord of Esztergom, who was between the breaking line of the two kings – always adapting to the current political-military situation – supported sometimes one, sometimes the other king, moreover, in 1529 had to participate in the siege of Vienna in Sultan Suleiman's camp. Only after 1532, did he commit himself to the side of King Ferdinand, when the Sultan again failed to occupy Vienna and to break the power of the Habsburgs in Central Europe, that is, when he no longer had to fear the wrath of King János Szapolyai. This was the place he really had to belong to, as he could collect the largest proportion of the income of the archdiocese (more than 2/3 of it) in Ferdinand's part.

Ferdinand, however, at first – understandably, in the light of these – has become very distrustful against Várday. This is also indicated by the fact that royal army was placed into Esztergom, one of the vanguards of Vienna along the coast of the Danube, with German and Spanish mercenaries. In 1531, even the Archbishop has been expelled from it. For a long time, he could not even go there. Thus, Várday had to pay a high price to regain Ferdinand's confidence. He spent the small amount of income he was left with after the continuous Turkish invasions and devastations of civil war on the maintenance of his castles in Esztergom, Újvár (Oláhújvár and Érsekújvár after the fall of Esztergom in 1543) and Ság and Drégely, well as to pay and supply the army with the necessary goods. According to his own admission, 200 horsemen and 150 infantrymen served in his castles. From various payment tables, we can prove that this number was somewhat less, about 150 horsemen and 100 infantrymen. Although, royal guard has also served in the castles, the ruler did not contribute to the expenses or to a small degree only, as at this time the Austrian, German and Czech provinces had barely begun their involvement in the funding of the formation of anti-Turkish border security. To top it all, the incomes of the Archbishop of Esztergom narrowed increasingly, which was also recognised by the XVI. article of the year 1537, binding the Archbishop of Esztergom to keep only 50 light armoured horsemen, which, in case of an invasion (threatening the whole country) had to be doubled and complemented by 200 additional knights. However, before the Battle of Mohács, his ancestors had to set 2 battalions to battle, that is, 800 people. So Várday – obviously, partially because of his treasurer experience – assigned lands to maintain the castle, which largely covered the payments-in-kind. He covered the payment of soldiers by pawning his income or loans. The annual costs of 12-13 thousand forint consumed the largest portion of his incomes.

A duality can be observed between archbishop, Várday and his chapter. Firstly, the current provost was his trusted man. Has also did much to place the chapter under proper conditions in Trnava, after the fall of Esztergom, while he stayed mostly in Bratislava, because of the ties of the governor's office. On the other hand, in 1527, when his interests sought so, nothing held him back from making the escaping chapter robbed, acquiring his treasures and archives for himself, which earlier was a difference between him and much of his contemporaries ravaging during the civil war. Many of the treasures were not returned to the chapter. But, he organized more councils in Esztergom to renew religious life, although made himself represented mostly by his *vicariuses* in ecclesiastical matters. However, he could not see his chief chancellor duties, as

the ruler – in spite of repeated requests – gave him the *sigillum duplex* (dual seal) for use after 1543 only. After concluding the peace of Oradea (1538) however, it was given to him to touch the shoulder of Queen Izabella, wife of King János in 1539 – with the permission of King Ferdinand – on the coronation of the Queen with the Holy Crown.

This clearly indicated gradual normalization of relations between the Habsburg Emperor and the Archbishop of Esztergom. Ferdinand trusted Várday more and more and after the resignation of governor-general, Elek Thurzó, on 30th December 1542 – with the usual *in abstentia nostra* formula – appointed Várday as a governor-general. Moreover, he had the widest range of powers of the 16th century governors. In fact, at the end of 1538, King Ferdinand took steps to appoint him to be a cardinal – all in vain. Not even after trying five times did the Holy See has done Várday a cardinal.

The Hungarian government council led by Várday until his death in 1549 created lasting values in several areas. Using the renewed authorization of the parliaments – at which moreover, Várday represented the ruler several times in the absence of Ferdinand – the governor judged continuously and not only during normal, forensic periods. After his appointment, he also executed a smaller mansion reform. After appointing Ferenc Révay to be a palatine governor (1542), Tamás Várday, the governor's brother served as a personal until the appointment of Mihály Mérey (September 1544), of which so far the research was not aware at all. Since the sources are silent on Várday's brother after this time, his career was probably ended by his unexpected death. Besides Tamás Várday personal, prothonotary tasks were appointed by Ambrus Chernel, familiarant of Tamás Nádasdy and György Pósa. After the departure of Chernel, prothonotary personal Antal Nagyváthy was addressing the governor's legislative tasks too. The smaller chancellery was lead by the personal, the function of which is supported by data at this time as well, and the governor could also use it. This is well indicated in the fact that Tamás Várday was initially called not only personal but governor prothonotary too. In summary, newly discovered sources also confirm, and overshadow even further Kiss István Rugonfalvi's statement, who otherwise did not draw a very positive picture on Várday: "Várday ... has achieved real success as a judge and with this he contributed the most to the restoration of peace".

The other area in which Várday's performance far surpassed the one of his predecessors was the cooperation with the chief commander appointed by the former Hungarian king. Várday managed to come to terms with Leonhard Freiherr von Vels, Hans Ungnad Freiherr von Sonneg

and Niklas Graf zu Salm und Neuburg officers, which had serious long-term significance. Várday's relationship with the Hungarian national chief captains, András Báthory and Tamás Nádasdy can also be said to be almost completely undisturbed. Várday participated in the collection of the *dica* and *subsidiium*, the strengthening of forts with serf labour, destroying the no longer needed castles, putting the castles of crucial importance into royal (chambereal) possession and filling them with soldiers. In short, the high priest governor had a crucial role in the shaping of the border castle system as well. He conducted negotiations with the appropriate captains in agreement with the main military commander in order to hire them.

An exceptionally high number of sources have remained to us on the governor's connection to the Pasha of Buda. Based on these, we can also state that this was not an ad hoc relationship (in most cases we know the envoy's instructions as well), but a permanent one. We also know that he had spies in order to gain information. But the governor intervened in chamber matters too. He had an important role in getting the group of the thirtieth of Trnava as a separate leader of the thirtieth out of the authority of the Hungarian Chamber for a while. And after the reorganization of the chamber at the end of 1548, several people close to him received the rank of councillor chamber, and his former magister curiae regiae, János Dessewffy eventually even got to the head office.

Overall, we can state, based on the remaining funds and the examined resources that Várday became such a governor-general, who could use his several decades long and diverse experience as a head of Hungarian administration and could use them in the new political environment as well. Public administration did not have an area in the broader sense of the word he did not reach, did not have an effect on by improving its work in the second part of the 1540s.

Finally, let us write about the people around the archbishop-governor, members of his court and his private audience, since our knowledge has been enriched in this area as well. We know, as it can already be seen from the example of Tamás Várday that he even tried to support his family. Of course he did not manage to reach huge land grants, it seems that he did not manage to grant the pledge he received when handing over the Castle of Esztergom. By making his brother person, however, he gave him the opportunity to rise up building his own career, as his successors Miklós Oláh archbishop and his contemporary bishops (Ferenc Forgách, Pál Gregoriánczy and György Draskovics) did later with more success and greater luck, getting their relatives into Hungary aristocracy. After the supposedly unexpected death of his brother he

supported his nephew, financing his studies abroad. This relative, also named Thomas, however, has not lived up to the expectations. Thus, the archbishop-governor's family remained gentry in Somogy County and later in the 1680s, with the extinction of the family disappeared completely from Hungarian history.

At the moment, unfortunately, we know only about a few land grants of the governor. Some of these were given to his family members, but he played a large role in funding families of other lords, as those of the already mentioned Ferenc Nádasdy and Tamás Révay. It was typical of him – probably because of his own experience as well – that he appreciated the years spent in office. Nor as Archbishop of Esztergom neither as governor was it typical of him to dismiss the people his predecessors had in office. He even applied Sebestyén Szerémi, the secretary of Elek Thurzó, whom he did not particularly like, as his own. Gergely Sibrik, Thurzó's Vice Lord Chief Justice, that is his Deputy Lord Chief Justice, became a member of the government council led by Várday after the death of Thurzó (1543). No data suggests that he would have interfered in appointing members of the council, although I find it inconceivable that many could have become members against his will.

Initially, Várday could have a very large court. In 1528/1529 his court in Buda cost 1,000 forint per month. In the 1540's, he definitely was not able to spend this much on it. His archdiocese income could not much exceed eighteen thousand forints a year, two third of which was already taken by his military keeping. And the 3,000 forint salary he received as a governor was not much. Unfortunately, we do not have much data on the money he paid to his employees, but his secretary for example earned 600 forints a year. Similarly to his predecessors, he had comes curiae, cofferer, butler and cup-bearer, and he also had to provide his poor relatives. Several years after his death, the chamber was still paying his debts. The inventories recorded after his death are not making a good impression either, for example, he only had 3,000 forints of cash.

After the exploration of the hardly known career from the fragmentary data, for Hungarian history writing, we can clearly tell: Pál Várday has not unfairly got to the top of the Hungarian political elite. His wide-ranging professional and official expertise, which he accumulated before 1526 as a treasurer, lifted him above his aristocrat contemporaries who were often shied away from such an immense task. His humbleness displayed towards his own position and the many tasks required by his procuratorial work, which had acquired for Várday

the growing respect of Ferdinand I of Habsburg, made him an ideal associate for the king. According to Miklós Istvánffy, Ferdinand I had become so fond of him that he – when the Archbishop of Esztergom was overtaken by drowsiness by the royal feasts in Vienna – even allowed him to stay in his private chamber or, at least, at the Hofburg for the night. It might seem curious, though, that no spectacular monuments or buildings commemorating Várday gone down to posterity and that even few is known about his activity as an artistic patron. However, it is highly probable that it is due to the chaotic period of military campaigns and civil wars which lead to the eventual collapse of Medieval Hungary, of which Várday must have been a witness and an instrument in its causing as well. Nevertheless, in the year of his death in 1549, life was much safer in the Habsburg-ruled Kingdom of Hungary than in the years after the fall of the archiepiscopal seat of Esztergom in 1543, when he began his work as a procurator. His role in achieving this significant outcome, and helping Ferdinand I and the Hungarian political elite governing jointly with the king in the establishment of new administrative, border defence and jurisdictional agencies across the country, was also vital and long-lasting.

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