

REMARKS TO THE BIOGRAPHY OF ISTVAN BRODARICS

NAPOMENE UZ BIOGRAFIJU STJEPANA BRODARIĆA

Peter Kasza

Department of Classical-Philology
and Neo-Latin Studies
University of Szeged
Egyetem u. 2., 6722 Szeged
Magyarország/Mađarska/Hungary
petrusfalx@gmail.com

Primljeno: 5. 5. 2010.

Prihvaćeno: 22. 9. 2010.

Rad ima dvije pozitivne recenzije

Izvorni znanstveni rad

Original scientific paper

UDK / UDC 94 (497.5)05 Brodarić

SUMMARY

In the title of my present study I promised a few remarks to the biography of István Brodarics, therefore on the next pages I am going to outline a few results of my researches which mainly have been published in Hungary and in Hungarian-language-periodicals and therefore for the Croatian scholars might be unknown.

Key words: Brodarics' date of birth, origin of *Historia verissima*

Ključne riječi: Brodarićev datum rođenja, porijeklo *Historia verissima* („*Najistinitiji prikaz bitke Ugra s turskim sultanom Sulejmanom na Mohaču*”, 1527.)

Since I promised remarks to the biography, in the first half of my study I am going to deal with the most important part in every single biography, this is the problem of Brodarics date of birth. Afterwards, as I am convinced that all of us can agree that Brodarics got his fame and reputation due to his report written about the tragical defeat at Mohács in 1526, the second half of the article deals with some aspects of the origin of this text.

So, let us start with the first topic, this is the question of Brodarics date of birth. In case of famous persons it is reasonable to want to know their date of birth and/or their date of death, since lack of this information, apart from other considerations, makes it much more complicated to organise anniversary-conferences like our present one.¹ In case of Brodarics we are lucky that we know exactly at least the date of his death, since he happened to die closely bang on time 470 years ago on 17th November 1539.

On the contrary we do not have any certain information about the date of his birth. From one of his letter written to Thomas Nadasdy in 1532, we do know that he was born on 20th October,² but we have no information about the year of his birth. Samuel Székely, who published the first longer study of Brodarics' life at the end of 19th century, presumed that Brodarics might have been born somewhen about 1490.³ Few years later, however, researches of Endre Veress made it

¹ The present study bases upon a lecture given at a conference *Humanism and Renaissance in Koprivnica and Podravina (Drava valley region)* on 14th November 2009 in Koprivnica.

² *Ex Quinqueecclesiis 20 Octobris, die meo natali 1532*. Cf. Kujáni Gábor, *Brodarics István levelezése 1508-1538* [The correspondence of István Brodarics], *Történelmi Társulat*, 1908, 288.

³ Székely Samu, *Brodarics István élete és működése* [Life and activity of István Brodarics], *Történelmi Társulat*, 1888, 2.

clear that Brodarics was already a student at the University of Padova in 1501,⁴ and since an approximately 11-year-old boy could not have been immatriculated as a regular student at any university, Brodarics must have been born before 1490.

At the beginning of 20th century two other researchers started to deal with the questions of Brodarics' biography. Pongrác Sörös, who dedicated an entire monography to Brodarics, due to some kind of misunderstanding, which I do not have space enough to explain now, dated Brodarics' birth to the year 1471.⁵ Few years later Gábor Kujáni tried to find more solid and reliable arguments to specify Brodarics' date of birth.⁶ Both of Kujáni and Sörös started out from one line of Brodarics' epitaph written by the famous humanist, Miklós Oláh.⁷ Oláh in this line mentioned that Brodarics had seen the glorious period of Hungary, and since both Sörös and Kujáni interpreted this as it should refer to the period of King Mathias, they were convinced that Brodarics must have been born much earlier before 1490, this is before king Mathias' death. They were going to specify a closer date based upon two statements. On the one hand, Brodarics remarked in a letter sent to Nádasdy in 1532 that he was slowly going to approach the old age, on the other hand, Miklós Oláh mentioned in 1539 that Brodarics was becoming old. According to Kujáni's argumentation nobody would be considered old before his 70s, therefore, Brodarics must have been close to this age when he died at 1539, so he must have been born at about 1470.⁸

Since nobody after Sörös and Kujáni dealt intensively with Brodarics' biography in the last more than hundred years, all the summaries and encyclopedies kept repeating their data, therefore the year 1470 became an indisputable canon.

Beside the sources used by Sörös and Kujáni, however, there are other documents as well, which does not define exactly Brodarics' year of birth, nevertheless they refer to his age. Scrutinising these, we can get important results. As I have mentioned before, we can prove, that Brodarics in 1501 was already studying in Padova. This academic education started somewhen about 1498-1499 supported by Johannes Jalsyth Brodarics' uncle and Oswald Thuz bishop of Zagreb, and lasted till 1506, when Brodarics returned home. If we accepted the year of birth suggested by Sörös and Kujáni, that would mean that Brodarics was closely 30 years old, when he began to study in Padova, in other words he was not a young man anymore, at least not according to the terminology valid in medieval or early modern age.

⁴ „1501. okt. 5. Super aula prima episcopatus Paduani. Privatum examen in iure canonico et doctoratus domini Andreae Pannonii Quinqueecclesiensis, canonici ecclesiae Zagabriensis. Testes: Magnificus D. Paulus Banfy et D. Blasius Banfy nobiles viri. D. Franciscus Aladar custos et canonicus ecclesiae Albaeregalis. D. Franciscus Therek archidiaconus et canonicus ecclesiae Zagabriensis. D. *Stephanus Brodaricz canonicus ecclesiae Zagabriensis*. D. Sigismundus Raskay archidiaconus et canonicus ecclesiae Strigoniensis. Omnes Paduani studentes.” Cf.: Veress Endre, *A paduai egyetem magyarországi tanulóinak anyakönyve és iratai* [The registers and documents about Hungarian students at the University of Padova], Budapest, 1915, 23.

⁵ Sörös Pongrác, *Jerosini Brodarics István*, Budapest, 1907, 7.

⁶ Cf.: Kujáni Gábor, *A Brodaricsok* [The Brodarics-family], Századok, 1913, 752-763.

⁷ Cf.: Oláh Miklós, *Carmina*, Ed. Iosephus Fógel et Ladislaus Juhász, Lipsiae, 1934, 57. Hac iacet inclusus gelida Brodericus in urna,/Cui decus et nomen pulchra corona dedit Phoebus in aethereo donec clarescet Olympo,/Dum tenebras densas Cynthia clara fugat, Semper erit Stephani virtus doctrina perennis,/Sancta fides, probitas et pietatis amor. Pontificis sacro vixit decoratus honore,/Cuius in officio sedulus usque fuit. O felix, claros patriae qui vidit honores,/Illius ast cladem cernere non voluit. Dum nullam potuit nostris adhibere medelam/Hisce malis, subito migrat ad astra poli.

⁸ Cf.: Kujáni Gábor, *A Brodaricsok* [The Brodarics-family], Századok, 1913, 757-758.

What do these aforementioned other documents say? We know Brodarics embellished coat-of-arms confirmed by Louis II. from 1517,⁹ and the text of this degree in some places refers to Brodarics studies in Italy. According to the text Brodarics was rather a boy (*prima adhuc pueritia*) then a youth, when he travelled to Italy and was only a young man leaving his youth behind (*adolescens et vir, pubertatem egressus*), when he gained the doctoral hat in canon-law.¹⁰ This hint of the coat-of arms can be rounded out with a statement of the French humanist, Jean de Pins, who shared a room and studied together with Brodarics in Bologna between 1503-1505. Jean de Pins writes as well that Brodarics, his fellow student, was still a quite young man, rather a teenager (*adulescentulus*) while studying in Padova at Giovanni Calphurnio.¹¹ Since in the contemporary terminology nobody, being about his 30th year would be called young man, even less youth or teenager, we can take it for granted that Brodarics coming home from Padova in 1506 could not be more than 25 years old, since according to the aforementioned sources he was still a young man (*adolescens*). Accepting this, he could have been 17-19 years old when arrived to Padova about 1498-1499. Concerning the above mentioned, I am convinced that the date of Brodarics' year of birth should be modified with ten years, from about 1470 to about 1480.¹²

The sources quoted by Sörös and Kujáni do not contradict this date of birth. Since Brodarics does not mention himself as an already old man, only as a person declining to the old age (*homo iam in senium vergens*). Furthermore, as in the 16th century a man could have been regarded as old not only in his 70s (as Kujáni believed), but already in his 60s, Brodarics in 1532 being only in his 50s could write that tough he still was not old, but was approaching to this age.

Now let us continue this paper with the other topic, with the problems of the origin of Brodarics' report written about the defeat at Mohacs. As it is well known, Brodarics took part in the battle at Mohacs as the chancellor of Hungary on 29th August 1526. He survived, and a bit later – between in the autumn of 1526 and in the spring of 1527 wrote a short report of the battle. His work entitled *Historia Verissima* was printed in the upcoming April 1527 in Cracow.¹³ According to the well known phrase, every book has its own fate (*habent sua fata libelli*) and this statement fits to Brodarics' work as well. Since Brodarics is the only witness who describes the events before the battle and of the battle from Hungarian point of view, every later historical work must be based on his report. Although no single example remained from the first edition, the *Historia*

⁹ The full text of the coat-of-arms see: Kujáni, *Brodarics István levelezése 1508-1538* [The correspondence of István Brodarics], Történelmi Tár, 1908, 342-344.

¹⁰ *prima adhuc pueritia ad omnium artium altricem Italiam missisti, eam ibi per multos annos variis disciplinis operam impendisti, ut adhuc adolescens et vir, dum pubertatem egressus non solum Graecis et Latinis litteris non mediocriter eruditus habereris, sed etiam iuris pontificii eam peritiam consequeris, ut te nobilissima orbis terrarum gymnasia ea adhuc aetate eius disciplinae insignibus et ornamentis dignum iudicarunt.* Cf.: Kujáni, *Brodarics István levelezése 1508-1538* [The correspondence of István Brodarics], Történelmi Tár, 1908, 343.

¹¹ *sed neque tamen a me sine piaculo taceri poterit Stephanus Pannonius, cognomento Brodarichus Zagroviensis contubernalis ante et condiscipulus meus iuvenis summo ingenio et incredibili facilitate et memoria praeditus, qui tametsi olim adhuc adulescentulus Patavii Calphurnium plusculos annos audiisset, sic tamen sub hoc nostro communi praeceptore profecerat, ut nisi suorum litteris iussus alio vertisset ingenium, magnum in eo studiorum genere fructum facturum videretur.* Cf. Révész Mária, *Néhány adat Philippus Beroaldus maior magyar összeköttetéseihez* [Few data to the Hungarian connections of Philippus Beroaldus maior], Egyetemes Philológiai Közlöny, 1941, 164-166.

¹² More about this topic see: Kasza Péter, *Egy karrier hajnala. Adalékok Brodarics István tanulmányainak és családi viszonyainak kérdéséhez* [Dawn of a career. Remarks to the Studies and Family Relationships of István Brodarics], Századok, 2008, 1198-1203.

¹³ Stephanus Brodericus, *De conflictu Hungarorum cum Solymano Turcarum imperatore ad Mohach historia verissima*, ed. Kulcsár Péter, Budapest, 1985.

verissima is indisputably one of the most famous and quoted work in Hungary among the works of the humanist historiography, therefore it is even more surprising that neither historians nor literary – historians dealt with the circumstances of the origin of this work in the last one hundred years.

Looking over the earlier literature on Brodarics, we can see that usually two details are mentioned in connection with the origin of *Historia verissima*. On the one hand Brodarics reported on the immediate antecedents of the tragedy at Mohacs, the course of the battle and the death of the Polish king Sigismund's nephew, Louis II. upon king Sigismund's request or rather his commission.¹⁴ On the other hand he wanted to reply to the famous Viennese humanist, Johannes Cuspinianus' accusations thrown on the Hungarians, which were formulated in his anti-Turkish rousing speech¹⁵ for the German estates and which was printed in Vienna in the end of 1526.¹⁶ Though it would be worth speaking about the real nature of the Cuspinianus' influence as well, concerning the lack of space on the last pages let us concentrate on the so called Sigismund's commission alone.

As I have mentioned, we do not have any single exemplar of the first edition, but in the later ones there is no dedication to king Sigismund, therefore the existence of the commission seems to be supported by the facts that the text was printed in Cracow, and while the author – although in a covert form – blames the Christian rulers for leaving Louis and Hungary alone in the life-and-death struggle against the Ottomans, he finds tricky excuses for Sigismund and the Polish for staying away.¹⁷ However, the final argument for the commission by Sigismund is provided by a certain letter written by Sigimund to Brodarics in September 1526, which sounds as follows:

„Reverendissime in Christo pater. Audientes vestram paternitatem ex tam ingenti naufragio serenissimi nepotis nostri et istius regni Hungariae salvam utcunque evasisse, cepimus non mediocrem voluptatem et in tanto dolore, quo tenemur, quod utique paternitas vestra incolumis sit, cuius in nos fidem et observantiam habemus compertissimam. *Et proinde rogamus illam describere nobis non gravetur, quid certi istic sit, cum de salute ipsius serenissimi nepotis nostri, tum etiam de rebus hostilibus et statu illius regni Hungariae; nam varii rumores huc quotidie ad nos deferri solent, sitque eius erga nos propensionis et observantiae, qua consuevit. Et bene valeat.*”¹⁸

¹⁴ Only this reason is mentioned by Samu Székely (*Brodarics István élete és működése* [Life and activity of István Brodarics], Történelmi Társ., 1888, 257.), and Brodarics' first monographer, Pongrácz Sörös (*Jerrosini Brodarics István*, Budapest, 1907, 82-83.).

¹⁵ *Johannis Cuspiniani Oratio protreptica ad Sacri Romani Imperii principes et proceres ut bellum suscipiant contra Turcum...* Viennae Austriae. s. a. [1526]

¹⁶ Lajos Hopp mentions both Sigismund's commission and Cuspinianus' *Oratio* among the reasons: Hopp Lajos, *Az „antemurale” és „conformitas” humanista eszméje a magyar-lengyel hagyományban* [The humanist idea of „antemurale” and „conformitas” in the Hungarian-Polish tradition], Budapest, 1992, 80-81; and so does Emma Bartoniek: Bartoniek Emma, *Fejezetek a XVI-XVII. századi történetírás történetéből* [Chapters from the history of Hungarian historiography in the 16-17th century], Budapest, 1975, 9. Besides, based on the Hungarian literature, Marianna D. Birnbaum also mentions these two reasons in her book: Marianna D. Birnbaum, *Humanists in a Shattered World: Croatian and Hungarian Latinity in the Sixteenth Century*, Los Angeles, 1986, 109.

¹⁷ *Nam de rege Poloniae Sigismundo, patruo regis alia prorsus ratio esse videbatur, quod is foedus cum Turca paulo ante pepigerat extremum excidium a suis regnis, quando aliter inter tot Christianorum principum dissidia non posset, vel hoc pacto avertere conatus, neque videbatur princeps integerrimus et fidei observantissimus contra confoederatum principem auxilia ulla praestiturus.* Brodericus, *De conflictu...*, 27.

¹⁸ Cf.: *Acta Tomiciana*, VIII, 222. (My italics – P. K.)

As we can see, the letter is quite short. In a few lines, Sigismund is expressing his joy that Brodarics has survived the battle and then the main point is coming: he is asking Brodarics to inform him about the fate of his nephew, Louis, about the activity of the enemy, the Ottomans, and the current situation of Hungary. It is definitely not a classic commission contract but with a little benevolence it can be interpreted as being one.

However, considering it more thoroughly one can note that basically nothing in the letter suggests that Sigismund encouraged Brodarics to write the story of the battle. He rather asked him for information on the given situation, his nephew's fate, the movements of the Turkish troops etc. We could say that the letter rather requested a „political” and not a „historical” report from Brodarics.

But if we read those letters, which were written about the same time in the Polish court, we can come to somewhat surprising discovery. These letters were written partly by Sigismund, partly by other Polish statesmen to various potentates of Hungary from Queen Maria through the voivod of Transylvania John of Szapolya to Baron Burgio.

The first one is a letter written to Maria Habsburg, in which Sigismund is asking her to inform him about Louis' fate and other developments as soon as possible. I am citing it:

„Accepimus infelicissimum nuncium, prostratum esse cum exercitu suo per Turcos serenissimum nepotem nostrum, dominum Ludovicum, tantamque in eo stragem commissam, ut de salute illius maiestatis non sit satis compertum. [...] *nosque cum de vita serenissimi conjugis sui tum etiam de rebus omnibus, quam celerius poterit, certiores facere dignetur.*”¹⁹

The second and the third extracts are from a letter from the Polish vice-chancellor, Piotr Tomicki to Brodarics and from another one from Sigismund to Baron Burgio. Paying attention to the italicized parts, we can see that both writers are asking the addressees, Brodarics and Burgio for information on Louis's fate and Hungary's situation.

„De interitu serenissimi domini, domini Ludovici, regis, tametsi iam propemodum apud nos conclamatum sit, tamen quia nescio, qui iique non ingrati et propterea non rejecti rumores spargantur, fore adhuc nonnullam spem de vita eius maiestatis.

Maiestas domini mei mittit istuc nuncium cum litteris. *Ego plurimum rogo vestram reverentissimam dominationem, ut quicquid certi et explorati cum de his, tum de ceteris habuerit, simul et reliquiae dominorum Hungarorum, quid praesefarant, quidve praetendant, quorsum animus et cogitationes suas dirigant, quid consilii in tam ancipiti fortuna capiant, quem sibi praeesse destinaverint, me litteris suis facere velit certiores.*”²⁰

„*Quia cum de salute illius maiestatis, tam etiam de reliquis rebus, uti se habent, adhuc plane incerti sumus, mittimus istuc nuncium nostrum, ut de omnibus quam primum certiores esse possimus rogamusque tam magnificenciam, ut nobis significare velit, quid cum illius maiestate et statu istius Regni sui agatur.*”²¹

Finally here is the fourth one, another letter to Maria Habsburg, in which the italicized part is again really important:

„*Quamvis significavit iam nobis maiestas vestra per suum nuncium casum et interitum serenissimi conjugis sui et nepotis nostri desiderantissimi, tamen quia post adventum hic nostrum non cessant varii rumores de illius maiestatis vita et quidem in dies magis invalescere [...] Plurimum rogamus maiestatem vestram, ut tam de vita ipsius serenissimi nepotis nostri quam etiam de*

¹⁹ Cf.: Acta Tomiciana, VIII, 213-214. (My italics – P. K.)

²⁰ Cf.: Acta Tomiciana, VIII, 222-223. (My italics – P. K.)

²¹ Cf.: Acta Tomiciana, VIII, 223. (My italics – P. K.)

rebus hostilibus et statu praesenti istius regni Hungariae nobis significare nobisque certum documentum, quid tandem indubie credere debeamus, praestare dignetur, nam et iusta, quae illius maiestati iam paravimus, distulimus exsolvere huiusmodi rumoribus de incolumitate ipsius [...] permoti.”²²

If we compare the italicized and boldfaced part of the last letter to the supposed commission letter addressed to Brodarics, the similarity strikes us immediately:

„Et proinde rogamus illam describere nobis non gravetur, quid certi istic sit, cum de salute ipsius serenissimi nepotis nostri, tum etiam de rebus hostilibus et statu illius regni Hungariae; nam varii rumores huc quotidie ad nos deferri solent [...]”

I suppose that the quoted texts are self-explanatory. All of them date back into first half of September 1526, when the Polish court did not have reliable information about king Louis's fate. I am convinced that the letters from Poland that I have cited earlier would not be valued differently to what they are: letters requesting information. Based on the correspondence of the time and the wording, we can state that most probably the letter written to Brodarics had the same purpose. *Thus in my opinion, it can by no means be read as a request for creating a historiographical work!*

Since the existence of the commission is not supported by any other sources, it is not mentioned neither in Brodarics's nor in his Polish friends correspondence, I suppose, we can state that king Sigismund did not play any role in the origin of the *Historia verissima*. To the fact that Brodarics really treats the Polish king and the Polish nation in a very subtle way, his circumstances can give sufficient explanation. Brodarics namely in the spring of 1527 was already going to leave the court of Maria Habsburg in Bratislava and the whole Habsburg-party, and was going to go back to Buda to court of the newly elected Hungarian king, John of Szapolya. Since the Polish court had good connection to John of Szapolya, who former was brother-in-law of king Sigismund, Brodarics hoped to be supported and recommended by his Polish friends and the king in approaching the Szapolya-party. Therefore it was in Brodarics's interest not to accuse the Polish king in any way to gain merits in the court the help of which seemed to be crucial for him in those weeks and month.²³

SAŽETAK

U naslovu ove studije obećao sam par napomena o Stjepanu Brodariću, stoga na sljedećim stranicama namjeravam istaknuti rezultate mojih istraživanja, koja su uglavnom bila objavljivana u Mađarskoj, u časopisima na mađarskom jeziku. Stoga će hrvatskim znanstvenicima možda biti nepoznata.

²² Cf.: Acta Tomiciana, VIII, 215. (My italics and boldface – P. K.)

²³ More about the problems of the origin of *Historia verissima* see: Kasza Péter, „Because I Can See that Some [...] Tell the Events Differently to How They Happened...” Comments to the Story of the Formation of István Brodarics's *Historia verissima*. *Camoenae Hungaricae*, 2007-2008, 47-63.