

FROM CONFLICT TO MARRIAGES. THE RELATIONS OF THE PIASTS OF POLAND AND THE ÁRPÁDS OF HUNGARY IN THE 1130S. PART 1.¹

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Abstract: BARABÁS, Gábor. *From Conflict to Marriages. The Relations of the Piasts of Poland and the Árpáds of Hungary in the 1130s. Part 1.* The research of the relations between certain rulers, territories or peoples can be considered as one of the classic topics of historiography in general and of Medieval Studies as well. The Polish-Hungarian contact in the Middle Ages is no exception, several scientific and popular works have dealt with the relations of the Piasts and Árpáds, and their respective realms. Nevertheless, it is to be underlined that we can only speak indirectly about international relations concerning the High Middle Ages, the personal contacts of the rulers and the dynastic ties established between the ruling families are of great importance when studying the various elements of the relations. This paper focuses on an interesting and controversial episode of the matrimonial history of the Piasts of Poland and the Árpáds of Hungary. In my opinion, despite the poor state of the sources, it can be assumed that King Béla II of Hungary and Duke Bolesław III Wrymouth of Poland in 1135 – 1136, in order to put an end to their hostilities, concluded an agreement on a double marriage between their dynasties. Only one of the two planned matrimonies were realized, yet I believe that the hypothesis formulated in this two-part study can be supported by a thorough analysis of the remaining sources and the political conditions of the 1130s.

Keywords: Poland, Hungary, twelfth century, genealogy, dynastic relations, peace, matrimony

“Answering this question or stirring up a hornet’s nest of the worst nature is about the same” (Wertner 1892, 234).

The study of Polish-Hungarian relations, the centuries of the “friendship”, has a long tradition in Hungarian and Polish historiography, and the medieval period is no exception. From the very beginning, the history of Poland and Hungary was intertwined in many ways (E.g. Kovács 1973; Kristó 2000; Kapronczay 2000; Wyrozumski 2001; Mesterházy 2004). It is important to underline, however, that one must be particularly cautious when dealing with the high Middle Ages in terms of relations between countries, or rather between political entities. The concepts of modern diplomacy are of limited application to the period. The very notion of foreign policy or international relations raises problems,² especially as it is questionable whether we can even speak of states before the late Middle Ages (Sashalmi 2021, 9-10). Prior to the fourteenth century, personal power played a dominant role, and that the relations between rulers were therefore also of a decisive nature in the system of relations between the various territories. In the period under

¹ Research for this study was supported by the János Bolyai Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (BO/00173/24) and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Pécs.

² For applying the methods of international relations in medieval Studies see Kozłowski 2020.

study, therefore, we can speak less of foreign policy and more of external relations.³ A fundamental aspect of this dynamic was the marital relations between dynasties and alliances strengthened through kinship ties, which in certain instances aimed at ending serious conflicts. And the proverbial Polish-Hungarian “friendship” was not free of such turbulence.

Regarding the political role of marriages, the Hungarian historian Péter Báling, who has thoroughly researched the early family history of the Árpáds based on the current results of Western scholarship, has recently pointed out the fact again that political considerations were of paramount importance in the context of the kinship relationships that developed, especially since in-laws and godparents were also considered as relatives in the spiritual sense (Báling 2021, 68.). However, as with all alliances, because of the personal nature of power, they were only valid in the lives of the parties involved (Báling 2021, 14; Kozłowski 2009, 86-87). Therefore, the research of the genealogy of the ruling dynasties is indispensable for Medieval Studies.

These dynastic ties, however, are often difficult to grasp and reconstruct in the eleventh – twelfth centuries, and the interpretation of the remaining sources may raise questions that cannot be answered at all or only vaguely. The genealogy of the Piasts and Árpáds⁴ is also full of problematic data that are not easy to interpret, especially in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. It is undisputed that the second wife of the Polish ruler Bolesław I the Brave (Chrobry) (992 – 1025) was of Hungarian origin, who is not known by name and is generally identified as the daughter of the Hungarian ruler, Prince Géza.⁵ A contemporary source, the Bishop of Merseburg, Thietmar, confirms this, but the chronicler provides no further information. It is, however, beyond dispute that the Polish prince's Hungarian wife gave birth to his son Bezprym (Kristó 2000, 5-6; Báling 2021, 87-89; Piastowie 1999, 25; Jasiński 1993, 83, 85-86).

However, the claim that the mother of the first Hungarian king, St. Stephen (1000 – 1038), i.e. the wife of Grand Prince Géza, was the Polish Adelheid, seems to be highly doubtful (Grzesik 1995; Kristó 2000, 7-9; Báling 2021, 94). The idea that the son of the first Hungarian king, Prince Emery, married the daughter of the Polish duke Mieszko II (1025 – 1034), which can be found in several Polish narrative sources, also belongs to the realm of fiction (Kristó 2000, 11). For the later period, the situation is much clearer thanks to the greater number of sources that have come down to us, as the case of King Béla I of Hungary clearly shows. Having been forced to flee Hungary under the reign of St. Stephen in the 1030s, he found refuge in the court of the Polish duke Mieszko II and married his daughter Richeza. She gave birth to his children, the future kings of Hungary, Géza I and St. Ladislav, and their younger brother Lampert (Kristó 2000, 12). The early twelfth-century “Polish” chronicler, Gallus Anonymus, even stated regarding St. Ladislav, rather exaggeratedly, that “[he] had been raised from childhood in Poland and had almost become a Pole in his ways and life.”⁶

Without going into the details of the relationship between the Hungarian royal family and the Piast rulers of Poland, it is worth mentioning the strong alliance between King Coloman the Learned (1096 – 1116) and Bolesław III Wrymouth (Krzywousty) (1107 – 1138). The Polish prince was related to Prince Álmos, the younger brother of Coloman the Learned, because in

³ Nevertheless, the usages of concepts from the history of diplomacy and the international relations does not seem to be entirely avoidable, as has been pointed out by the authors of relevant works in recent years and decades. See among others Makk 1996, 5; Báling 2021, 25-29; Rudolf 2023, 11.

⁴ Fundamental works in this regard: Wertner 1892; Jasiński 1993; Piastowie; Báling 2021.

⁵ The idea has emerged in the research that the bride came from another Hungarian tribe, not that of the Árpáds. See Báling 2021, 88-89.

⁶ “Qui Wladislaus ab infancia nutritus in Polonia fuerat et quasi moribus et vita Polonus factus fuerat” (Knoll – Schaer 2003, 96-97). For the figure of St. Ladislav in the *Gesta* see: Bagi 2005, 130-167; Bagi 2008, 101-129.

1104 he married Predslava Iziaslavna, a sister of Prince Sviatopolk Iziaslavich of Kiev, (1093 – 1113), meanwhile Bolesław III had been married to Predslava's sister Zbyslava, probably since the previous year (Makk 1991, 7; Báling 2021, 518; Font 2021, 104-105, 128; Piastowie 1999, 78; Jasiński 1993, 188-189). Álmos must have relied on this relationship when in 1106, he sought support from the Polish prince, after failing to obtain help from the German king, Henry V, (1105 – 1125, emperor from 1111). His hopes were not disappointed, as the Hungarian chronicle confirms that he took the castle of Abaújvár with Polish support (Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV. In SRH 1999, cap. 147, 426-427; Bak – Veszprémy 2018, 272-273).⁷

Álmos, however, was unsuccessful in his attempt to vanquish his brother, Coloman the Learned. Consequently, a solemn and symbolic act of submission or self-subjection (*deditio*) was initiated, wherein Álmos acknowledged his subordinate status (Bagi 2020, 172-181). Bolesław III Wrymouth then initiated negotiations with King Coloman the Learned, who, albeit with some hesitations, recognised the similarities in their situations, as the Polish prince was also fighting for power in Poland with his brother, Zbigniew (Dalewski 2008, 77-84). From this point onwards, the two rulers began to cooperate. After Bolesław III drastically ended his own internal conflict by blinding his own brother,⁸ as a form of penance, he took part in a pilgrimage to Hungary in 1113 (Kristó 2000, 15-16; Dalewski 2008, 87, 100; Bagi 2020, 128-129; Báling 2021, 251; Zupka 2016, 156-161). A lasting alliance was thus established between the two rulers, which also meant friendship in arms. This alliance endured until the death of Coloman and the reign of his son King Stephen II (1116 – 1131) persisting until 1127. In that year, the Hungarian ruler attacked the Polish borders in connection with his intervention in the internal conflicts of Kievan Rus' (Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV. In SRH I 1999, cap. 153, 434; Bak – Veszprémy 2018, 282-283; Kristó 2000, 15-16; Font 2021, 131-133; Dalewski 2008, 187).

After the death of Stephen II, who passed away without a male heir in 1131 (Kádár 2017), the branch of Álmos rose to power in the Kingdom of Hungary with the new king, Béla II the Blind (1131 – 1141). In this situation the Polish prince chose to support King Coloman's illegitimate son, Boris, against the new Hungarian ruler. Boris's mother Euphemia Vladimirovna of the Rurik dynasty, second wife of King Coloman, was deposed by the king for adultery, Boris Kolomanovich was born and raised in the Rus' and tried to gain Power in Hungary only after the death of Stephen II,⁹ seeking help in the Byzantine Empire and later by the Polish prince, his alleged father's old ally (Makk 1972, 42; Font 2021, 133-135). In 1132, Boris and Bolesław III led an army into the Kingdom of Hungary, but they were severely defeated at the River Sajó. The Polish ruler then had to face an alliance formed by Béla II and Soběslav I (1125 – 1140), the Bohemian prince, and probably Vladimírko Volodarevich of Zvenigorod. This tense situation lasted until 1135, when Emperor Lothair III (1125/1133 – 1137) forced Bolesław III to acknowledge his submission at the Hoftag in Merseburg, and consequently to withdraw his support from Boris Kolomanovich (Makk 1987, 63-64; Makk 1996, 170-171, 175-176; Kristó 2000, 15-16; Piastowie, 82; Font 2021, 135-136; Zupka 2016, 172-175).

The first third of the twelfth century was, therefore, a relatively turbulent period in Hungarian-Polish relations. This naturally had an impact on the family relations between the Árpáds and the

⁷ See Kristó 2000, 14-15.

⁸ It can be assumed that this act served as an example for King Coloman the Learned when he blinded his brother Álmos and his son, the future King Béla II. See Kristó 2000, 15.

⁹ There is one, although extremely uncertain data in the Hungarian Chronicle-Composition, which could be interpreted as evidence for Boris's activity in Hungary during the reign of King Stephen II, but the identification of Boris with *comes* Bors is highly doubtful. "Led on by vain hope, *ispán* Bors and Ivan were chosen by traitors as king" (Bak – Veszprémy 2018, 294-295). See Kádár 2017, 801-803.

Piasts. Nevertheless, as far as the dynastic relations are concerned, the situation is particularly complex and therefore difficult to assess.

Let us start the analysis with a historiographical data which, at first sight, seems quite clear. The concept emerged in the historiography that in 1108 Prince Bolesław III betrothed one of his daughters, Judith, to King Coloman the Learned's son, the future Stephen II. This statement is based on the report of the fifteenth-century Polish chronicler Jan Długosz, according to whom this marriage was the reason why the territory of Spiš (Hungarian: Szepesség) was given to the Hungarian king as a dowry.¹⁰ The information provided by Długosz is certainly false. Although Bolesław III undoubtedly had a daughter named Judith, she was born not to his first wife Zbyslava, but to his second spouse, Salomea, whom he married in the 1110s (Piastowie 1999, 80, 97-98). It is not impossible that Długosz, who synthesized the results of earlier Polish historiography, based the report of the engagement on the news of the *Kronika Wielkopolska* (Chronicle of Greater Poland) written the late thirteenth, early fourteenth century (EMC 2010, 394), which reveals that the son of the Hungarian king, Coloman the Learned, married Bolesław II's daughter and received the territory of Spiš as a dowry.¹¹ The fact that Bolesław was the contemporary of King Coloman and his son, Stephen II suggests that the relation in the source is definitely questionable, or even completely wrong. As Ryszard Grzesik, among others, has pointed out, the chronicle probably confused a later event with the case of Bolesław III's daughter, namely the engagement of Prince Coloman of Slavonia (Font – Barabás 2019; Homza 2021), the second son of King Andrew II of Hungary (1205 – 1235), to the daughter of the Prince of Cracow, Leszek the White (Biały), Princess Salomea, concluded at the meeting in Spiš in 1214. This is also indicated by the mention of the Principality of Galicia in the text of the chronicle (Font 2021, 177-185, Grzesik 2002, 490-491).

The marriage of Coloman and Salomea at the beginning of the thirteenth century is sufficiently clear (Font 2021, 177-185; Font – Barabás 2019, 21-41), so we need to further examine the life and situation of the Polish princess Judith. Genealogical research places the birth of Judith, whose name is confirmed by other sources, around 1130 precisely on the basis of a Hungarian-related record (Piastowie 1999, 98; Jasiński 1993, 256-257). Several Polish annals, including the earliest ones belonging to the tradition of Lesser Poland (Rocznik Traski and Rocznik Krakowski), contain entries, which state that in 1136 Bolesław III wed his daughter to the son of the Hungarian king.¹² On the basis of this dating, it has become accepted in Polish historiography that Judith was betrothed to the future Hungarian king, Géza II (1141 – 1162) (Piastowie 1999, 98; Jasiński

¹⁰ "Colomannus Hungarie rex filio suo natu maiori Stephano filiam Iuditham, Boleslai Polonorum ducis, desponsat in uxorem, provinciam Szepusiensem, que tunc juris Polonorum fuerat <et pars eius non modica in diocesi Cracoviensi consistebat>, Boleslaus filie in dotem consignat, que ab eo tempore sequestrata a Polonia in proprietatem Hungarorum transiit" (Ioannis Dlugossii IV, 237). Cf. Wertner 1892, 234.

¹¹ "Jste Boleslaus filiam suam de Ruthena genitam Colomanno regis Ungarorum filio matrimonialiter copulavit. Cui nomine dotis castellaniam de Spis quoad viveret possidendam assignavit. Quem Colomanum una cum rege Ungarorum Halliciensibus in regem prefecerat ipsum coronari facientes. Cuius coronacione rex Boleslaus prout erat credulus per regem Ungarorum dolose circumventus castellaniam de Spiss [dedit] et loco eiusdem castellaniam Premisliensem nomine dotalicii filie sue recepit. Hec autem dolositas fecit origo dissensionum inter Polonos et Ungarns prout in sequentibus patebit. Et sic castellania de Spiss a Polonis alienata per Ungarns usque ad presens fraudulenter detenta occupatur" (Kürbis 1970, 39). See Grzesik 2002, 490.

¹² "Boleslaus dat filiam regis filio Ungarorum." (Rocznik Traski. In MPH II 1872, 832); "Boleslaus dat filiam suam regi Ungarie" (Rocznik Krakowski. In MPH II 1872, 832). See Jasiński 1993, 255-256; Grzesik 2002, 491; Grzesik 2003, 7.

1993, 255-257), a view that has also found its way to certain Hungarian works (Kovács 1973, 21; Kapronczay 2000, 14-15), therefore it is worth examining this possibility.

If we give credit to the annals' data, there is not only one person who can be considered as the son of the Hungarian king Béla II. Besides the future king Géza II, the annals' data can also be applied to his younger brothers, the future usurper, Ladislav II (1162 – 1163), or even to their younger brother, another future usurper himself, Stephen IV (1163), as the son of the in the texts otherwise unnamed Hungarian king.¹³ In the case of the former, István Katona had already proposed the idea (Katona 1780, 565-569), but the argument of the eminent eighteenth-century historian was met with the thorough criticism of Mór Wertner, the renowned genealogist of the late nineteenth century (Wertner 1892, 324-331). Without going into all the details, it can be pointed out, in agreement with Wertner, that there is indeed no evidence that the engagement of Prince Géza and his later wife Euphrosyne, the sister of Grand Prince Iziaslav Mstislavich of Kiev (1146 – 1154) actually took place in the 1130s (Cf. Font 2021, 119-120), i.e. we do not necessarily have to follow Katona and to reject the version that the first-born son of King Béla II was engaged to the daughter of Prince Bolesław III Wrymouth. However as Wertner also points out, only one case is known among the children of Béla II when an engagement took place during the lifetime of the king, namely that of his daughter's, Sofia's (Wertner 1892, 328). In my opinion, however, due to the lack of sources, it cannot be ruled out that other children of Béla II were also engaged, especially since they were all minors in the 1130s and they could therefore, have played a role in dynastic politics.

I do not think we can completely rule out the possible involvement of either prince, especially not on the basis of their later marriages, since even if we accept the engagement preserved in Polish sources (Jasiński 1993, 257), we can be sure that the marriage did not take place in the end. On this basis, the later marriages of the royal brothers,¹⁴ or in the case of Ladislav, the rejection of the Byzantine bride offered to him in the 1150s (Moravcsik 1988, 274; Makk 1978, 20-21), do not provide any definitive proof for a possible earlier engagement.

A further assumption can be made about one of the later usurpers, or with other words counter-kings, although it is not supported by sources. For reasons of temporal proximity, however, it is worth noting that in the spring of 1137, Béla II placed his second son, Ladislav, as prince at the head of newly conquered part of Bosnia, called Rama in Hungarian sources (Makk 1996, 178). As this was during the lifetime of his new ally Bolesław III Wrymouth, the planned marriage of their children may have played a role in this decision. However, this is no more than a mere possibility, which is not supported by any evidence.

Returning to the sources concerning the engagement, the situation is further complicated by the fact that another work, the Annals of Lesser Poland (*Rocznik Małopolski*), refers to the engagement and the name of the bride as early as 1122/1123.¹⁵ However, as we have evidence that the contemporary Hungarian king, Stephen II had no son (Kádár 2017, 787-790), it is likely that the tradition of the later date is closer to the truth. It is worth noting that the engagement is also recorded in the Annals of Lesser Poland by the year 1136,¹⁶ which also confirms the later date. The Annals of Cracow (*Rocznik Krakowski*), like the earliest and most reliable annals, the *Rocznik Traski* (Jasiński 1993, 255), mention the betrothal in 1136, but with an important difference. According to this account, it was not the son of the king of the Hungarians but the ruler of Hungary himself who

¹³ Kazimierz Jasiński based on the work of Oswald Balzer disregards this possibility (Jasiński 1993, 256).

¹⁴ Stephen married the niece of Emperor Manuel Komnenos, Mary in the late 1150s. See Makk 1978, 13.

¹⁵ "Tandem dai filiam nomine Iuditham filio regis Ungarie" (*Rocznik Małopolski*. In MPH III 1878, 152 and also 153). See Grzesik 2003, 7.

¹⁶ "Boleslaus dat filiam regis filio Ungarorum" (*Rocznik Małopolski*. In MPH III 1878, 152).

won the hand of the daughter of Bolesław III.¹⁷ However, since the other manuscript traditions clearly mention the son of the Hungarian ruler, we can assume that the other formulation could be a mistake.

As previously mentioned, it is evident that, if there was an engagement between a son of the Hungarian king Béla II, presumably the future Géza II, or perhaps his brothers Ladislav or Stephen, and the daughter of Bolesław III, Judith at all, it was not followed by an actual marriage.¹⁸ Instead, Géza II proceeded to marry Euphrosyne, the sister of Grand Prince Iziaslav Mstislavich of Kiev, in 1146 (Font 2021, 119-120). Conversely, Judith entered into matrimony with Otto, the son of Albert the Bear, the future Margrave of Brandenburg (1157 – 1170), in 1148 (Jasiński 1993, 252, 255, 257-258). We can only assume that if an actual marriage had been annulled, it could have appeared in the narrative sources of the period, although this way we would use the *argumentum ex silentio*. In any event, the annulment of the betrothal has been linked by certain Polish scholars to the fact that another marriage, between Mieszko III the Old (Stary) and Elizabeth, had already provided a sufficient basis for Piast-Árpád relations at this time.¹⁹

At last, we need to examine a third, albeit highly tenuous, theory about Judith's engagement. The above-quoted passage from the *Kronika Wielkopolska*, the engagement of the daughter of Bolesław III to the son of the Hungarian king, Coloman, has been interpreted as referring to the alleged son of the monarch, Coloman the Learned, i.e. Prince Boris (Wertner 1892, 259-276). The Hungarian pretender in fact, is actually referred to as Kolomanos in Byzantine sources, presumably using the name to bound himself to his father (Makk 1987, 61; Font 2021, 136). In chapter 30 of the *Kronika Wielkopolska* we can read of King Colomanidis of Galicia,²⁰ a name clearly identified with Boris in the notes by the editor of the critical edition, Brigitta Kürbis.²¹ However, I believe that this is not tenable, as Márta Font has recently also indicated, Boris was never king of Galicia, and based on the narrative we can be fairly certain that the events in question are a projection of those that occurred a century later, namely the royal title of Prince Coloman, son of King Andrew II (Font 2021, 136).

In the case of the engagement-story in chapter 27 of the chronicle, quoted above, the identification with Boris is absent in the latest critical edition.²² However, the 1872 edition does exhibit several discrepancies. For instance, the text employs the possessive form of the name *Colomanus* in reference to Bolesław's daughter thereby alluding to the king himself rather than his son. In contrast, the name of the bride, Judith also appears in the entry.²³ In a note, the editor, Wacław Alexander Maciejowski, clearly identified King Coloman's son as Boris.²⁴ A few lines below, in connection with Coloman's becoming king of Galicia, the version *Colomanidis* is used, not *Colomanus*, as in the 1970 edition, without any critical reference.²⁵ This would also seem to suggest that the chronicler was writing about Boris, but in the most recent critical edition, using the version *Colomanus*, the editor, Kürbis, also argues that the chronological place can be clearly

¹⁷ "Boleslaus dat filiam suam regi Ungarie" (Rocznik Krakowski. In MPH II, 832).

¹⁸ Stephen married Mary Komnena, a Byzantine princess and niece of Emperor Manuel Komnenos in the late 1150s. A few years later, Ladislav turned down the offer of a marriage in Constantinople. See Makk 1978, 13, 20-21.

¹⁹ Jasiński 1993, 256; Piastowie, 98. This possibility will be dealt with in part two of this study.

²⁰ "De expulsione Colomanidis regis Haliciensis" (Kürbis 1970, 46).

²¹ Kürbis 1970, 46, 153.

²² Kürbis 1970, 39.

²³ "Iste Boleslaus filiam suam, de Ruthena genitam, nomine Juditam Colomani, regis Hungarorum filio matrimonialiter copulavit" (Maciejowski 1872, 508).

²⁴ Maciejowski 1872, 508, note 2.

²⁵ „Quem Colomanidem" (Maciejowski 1872, 508).

identified as an anachronism.²⁶ In the light of the evidence presented, while the political landscape of the early 1130s cannot be entirely discounted, we can with great certainty reject the hypothesis that the illegitimate son of King Coloman the Learned, Boris, was engaged to the daughter of Bolesław III, Judith (Wertner 1892, 278). It is no *novum* though, in the current research, there is no mention of Boris's alleged engagement to a Piast princess at all (KMTL 1994, 120-121; Makk 1987; Raffensperger 2012, 90-91; Báling 2021, 506-511; Font 2021, 118-119, 133-137, 140). Especially since we can be sure that around 1130, prior to seeking the support of Bolesław III, he married a relative of Emperor John II of Komnenos in Constantinople, presumably Princess Anna Doukina (Makk 1987, 62; Makk 1996, 174, Báling 2021, 507-508).

This statement does not, however, conclude the analysis of the Piast–Árpád dynastic relations in the period in question. There is, namely, a family tie also from the 1130s, concerning which there is no doubt that it was established, the marriage of Mieszko III the Old and a Hungarian princess, Elizabeth. Nevertheless, this case cannot be called completely clear either. This marriage between the Piasts and the Árpáds will be the topic of the second part of this study.

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²⁶ Kürbis 1970, 151, note 221.

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