The Sword and the Crucible

The Sword and the Crucible: Count Boldizsár Batthyány and Natural Philosophy in Sixteenth-Century Hungary

By

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In memory of Anna

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

When trying to write the biography of someone who died more than 400 years ago, it is very hard to rely on facts alone, especially when facts are not plentiful. There is a temptation to add a bit here and there, to complement the impressions we get—and having spent seven years with this research, one necessarily grows attached to the subject, especially if it is a human being with many likable qualities. However, trying to exclude the historian's subjective self may also lead to an undesired end—a dry and impersonal account, a list of dates and events we are certain of, behind which the human being may easily disappear from our view. We will never know for sure what made a person happy in the sixteenth century, what his biggest worries were, and what an average day of his life looked like—but using the facts carefully we can get really close.

Biography writing has many pitfalls: the paucity of sources—especially with regard to a sixteenth-century individual—may leave huge gaps in the chronological narration which the author, willingly or unconsciously, tries to fill. While it is an ideal way to show that the individuals and their behaviour cannot be reduced to general normative systems, it also provides the best foundation for testing the validity of scientific hypotheses about the way social rules and regularities really worked in that period.[1] In the present work the historical, social, and political context indeed receives a huge emphasis. It will help us understand the motives as well as the modes of behaviour of this particular man, and what influences he may have been exposed to. At the same time, the context itself is changeable, and reciprocally influenced by the individuals. Thus, it cannot provide a firm or normative background. In addition, the objectivity or subjectivity of the writer are also in play, since every narration is already an interpretation, no matter how historical one's approach to the biography writing is. To avoid these pitfalls, I shall clearly indicate the threshold between reality (facts supported by sources) and imagination (filling in the gaps in sources by narrating what might plausibly have happened).

The similarities between criminal and historical investigation have been observed before[2]: a biographer has to pay close attention to details just like Sherlock Holmes or the microhistorians. Our subject is not one that would usually attract the attention of the latter since our protagonist

does not belong to popular culture; he is not a rebel, an illiterate, a heretic, or a criminal. At the same time, as an individual and subsequently a circumscribed phenomenon, some of the microhistorian's approach can be applied on him. This approach usually raises questions about selectivity and significance, that is, how representative of broader social trends and collective mentalities the subject's activities and thoughts are and what the few can tell us about the many.

This book is about Boldizsár Batthyány (c.1542–1590), an aristocrat, a public figure, a warlord, head of a family, owner of a large estate, a patron and, above all, a man full of curiosity. This work is a study of his manifold interests, a biography in which I try to touch upon all aspects of his life, and particularly those elements which will permit me to place him within the context of contemporary trends and tendencies in natural philosophy. As a man he was certainly unique, but he also represented a projection of the worries and interests of his time. This dichotomy can be best illustrated through the Renaissance idea of microcosm and macrocosm: every man is a little world in his own right but also a perfect rendering of the macrocosm, a reflection of the great world. Batthyány's beliefs are impossible to decipher without knowledge of his intellectual environment. His conduct in matters confessional, political, or even, familiar, were not those of a recluse, but rather of a man who travelled and saw a lot and hence was exposed to the most varied influences.

He was not an isolated phenomenon. The contextualisation of his life story and activities will show that although in some ways Batthyány was indeed a unique individual, he was also quite characteristic for his time. In literature more and more attempts are made "to carve out a middle course between scientific biography and the history of scientific institutions attentive to how cultural categories intersect with individual lifelines."[3] Recently, Sibum and Daston proposed to apply Mauss' anthropological notion of 'persona' in the domain of the history of science with the intention of finding out "when, where and why did distinctive scientific personae appear." Personae are creatures of historical circumstance, they emerge and disappear within specific contexts, and they are categories of people, not individuals.

In the present work, I would like to combine the two, apparently conflicting, approaches: on the one hand, to draw the portrait of this individual very carefully, finding out every possible detail about his life, and on the other, recognise the general tendencies and traits that place him in a certain category of people. Batthyány, the unique individual is also a type of 'scientific persona' which emerged in sixteenth-century Europe: the persona of the prince-practitioner.[4] Indeed, one can hardly find an

aristocratic court or residence of ecclesiastic authority devoid of some form of 'scientific' activity—in particular, the occult arts, such as alchemy, the divinatory arts and hermetism. A man of noble birth at this time would not have shrunk from the idea of manual labour, if it meant production of knowledge. The aristocrat nursing his flowers and busying himself with his rare plants in the garden or experimenting in the alchemical laboratory became a recognisable type. The epitome of this persona is Emperor Rudolf II, whose passion for many of the occult arts was well known among contemporaries, and most of the protagonists of the late sixteenth-century *theatrum mundi* were connected to him in one way or another.

Large portions of this book are concerned with the theoretical and practical approach of Boldizsár Batthyány and his contemporaries to nature. I chose to use the term 'natural philosophy' instead of 'science' for a wealth of reasons. While the Greek *episteme* and the Latin *scientia* have been widely used in the sense of 'knowledge' and 'skill' in written sources, their English equivalent, 'science' (or the neo-Latin correlatives) does not occur until at least the eighteenth century.[5] The term 'science' brings to mind images of people in white smocks working in a modern laboratory testing hypotheses under controlled circumstances. Modern scientists are professionals who pursue an activity with clear aims, purposes and methods, and live off their work. Many of our prince-practitioners, on the contrary, were driven primarily by their intellectual curiosity (even when they hoped to improve their finances). Their work was not often done in purpose-designed buildings, was rarely controlled or designed, and their methodology was not necessarily empirical. Cunningham's suggestion that "what we should be exploring and trying to reconstruct is human activity in investigating Nature,"[6] could not be more appropriate for our purposes. In contrast to the anachronistic term 'science', natural philosophy is a comfortable umbrella concept which covers all attempts at understanding and imitating both hidden and explicit natural mechanisms.[7] This Aristotelian category incorporates most of the activities Boldizsár Batthyány and his friends and correspondents pursued, which were closely related, such as botany and alchemy.[8]

Some concepts under the umbrella also seem anachronistic and superfluous. Even in recent scholarship, one may encounter two terms, 'alchemy' and 'chemistry,' applied to indicate different approaches to nature with alchemy understood as being the more archaic, even primitive, superstitious and irrational, in contrast to chemistry, which represents a rational, modern and scientific approach. In their joint article, Newman and Principe argued that the parallel existence of two terms in the early

modern period did not correspond to two different disciplines or sets of practices, but instead were synonyms largely interchangeable until the eighteenth century. Only then did alchemy become identified particularly with metallic transmutation while chemistry was more and more defined as the art of analysis and synthesis.[9] Hence they argued that it was more accurate to use one term for discourses on the alchemical/chemical tradition in this transitory period, and they proposed the archaically spelled 'chymistry.'[10] The scope of this book, however, does not extend beyond the sixteenth century, where the Latin terms *alchemia* and *chemia* were largely synonymous, and I find it suitable to use only 'alchemy' to incorporate all the various metallurgical, transmutational, medico-alchemical theories and practices present in Batthyány's time.

Boldizsár Batthyány did not live at the Imperial court, but instead spent most of his time on his estates in Western Hungary, and had he not kept in touch with the world, could easily have become isolated. Since his duties as paterfamilias and landowner did not allow him to travel much and visit his acquaintances in person, he did what most literate people did at this time: he wrote and received letters. This was perfectly usual in the age of the *respublica literaria*, when intellectuals would build and maintain their network of acquaintances through correspondence, instead of personal encounters which were only rarely possible due to long travelling distances. Networking played a very important role in the exchange of information, as well as objects and various curiosities, as Batthyány's example will also show.

The list of his friends, correspondents, and other social contacts is an impressive one. Directly or indirectly, he was acquainted with many outstanding members of the Hungarian and foreign intelligentsia. Due to the international character of these acquaintances, and the fact that the best way to keep in touch with people, even members of the family, was through correspondence, the primary sources for my research on the life of Boldizsár Batthyány comprised letters, most of them kept at present in the collection of the National Archives of Hungary.[11] In this work I have dealt with approximately five hundred private letters, only a few of which have ever been published. My survey is nevertheless far from complete: I am aware that even more correspondents, more letters, and more details could have been drawn into analysis but they would not have changed my conclusions.

Archival sources do not constitute a complete body of materials: we lack the majority of Boldizsár's own letters, since they were sent all over Europe, from Paris to Vienna, from Frankfurt to Pozsony. Unfortunately, I have not encountered unknown Batthyány letters in either Vienna (Haus-,

Hof- und Staatsarchiv) or Graz (Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv) or Třeboň (Státní Oblastní Archív v Třeboni) which he would have written to members of his informal circle. Indeed, it is only with the botanist Clusius that letters from both of them survive, although even these letters do not always follow each other subsequently. Consequently, it was only possible to reconstruct the Count's letters from the answers he received. As there are no last wills remaining from Boldizsár, and no texts of the funeral speeches delivered graveside, I have had to rely extensively on data retrieved from letters exchanged between members of the family, as well as friends and other acquaintances of the Batthyánys.

The present work can pride itself with being the very first full-scale monograph ever written about Boldizsár Batthyány. Nevertheless, it relies heavily upon the results of research pursued previously by different generations of historians, primarily from the early twentieth century onwards. Count Batthyány has always been well known in Hungarian historiography and the vast number of sources pertaining to his figure and his age, as well as to his extended and famous family, has been a regular quarry of information for historians working in different fields of research. Despite the recognition of the relevance of both the figure and the sources, however, neither has been fully exploited. The historian Sándor Takáts used the Batthyány archives extensively in his innumerable works in the first decades of the twentieth century, and his quotations—though very often lacking exact indication of the source—preserved a huge bulk of information about sixteenth-century Hungarian cultural, political, and medical history.[12]

The Batthyány archives have suffered many misfortunes.[13] After the destruction the collection suffered in Körmend at the hands of the Soviet soldiers in 1945, the surviving and still large number of documents was transferred to Budapest, to the National Archives. During the revolution of 1956, however, the building of the archives was hit by a grenade and a large part of the precious Batthyány collection was destroyed by the subsequent fire. Thanks to the systematic efforts of the historian Béla Iványi who made summaries of many of the letters and also transcribed a great number of charters before the Second World War, we know the contents of some of the letters that were later lost.[14] Batthyány-research intensified again in the 1970s when literary and cultural historians, such as Tibor Klaniczay and Robert J. W. Evans, repeatedly called attention to the rich material kept at the National Archives of Hungary. György Endre Szőnyi recognised the international relevance of Batthyány's activities from the point of view of the history of scientific mentalities in the late sixteenth century,[15] while Szabolcs Ö. Barlay dedicated a number of

articles to Boldizsár Batthyány's figure and explored part of his intellectual network.[16] Although Barlay started to dig deeper in the archival material and even contextualise Batthyány's interest for alchemy, he never wrote the monograph he planned to write. I rely also upon the research pursued by István Monok and Péter Ötvös on the once-extant library of Boldizsár Batthyány.[17] Since many of Batthyány's letters remained unpublished and constitute a rich body of sources, I undertook the annotated edition of the most interesting—approximately two hundred—pieces of his correspondence (forthcoming in 2010).

Throughout this book I will look at the whys and ways alchemy and botany were practised in this particular noble household, and explore the wider context of natural philosophical experimentation in late sixteenth-century Europe. While trying to delineate how this Hungarian case connects to similar pursuits in other parts of Europe, I will try to find Batthyány's place on the intellectual map of his time. It is also to see how circumstances determined his conduct: Was he in some way hindered by the restrictions of his particular historical background? How much did his relationship with the Habsburg rulers and what they represented influence his attitude? This is also particularly relevant, because Batthyány was not an author. He left no original works behind. There are no written accounts of his ideas, thus, we have no direct access to his thoughts. As a patron, his point of view can be best approached through the works and activities of his protégés. Through them we can get at Batthyány's interests and see what things he deemed worthy of support. Finally, the question of representation arises. Was Batthyány, like many of his fellow patron-practitioners, driven by a desire to impress the outside world? How much was he motivated by ambition and how much by an intimate interest in his work as a patron and collector?

The book combines chronological and thematic approaches: the biography of Boldizsár Batthyány provides a framework for the analysis of his activities as a patron, book collector, and practitioner of botany and alchemy. Chapter One introduces his background, the political situation of the Kingdom of Hungary and the emergence of the Batthyány family, and delineates his biography to his adult years. Chapter Two looks at the history and composition of his book collection in the light of the natural philosophical trends of his time. Chapter Three focuses on the actual experimental activity of Batthyány and his correspondents: the private, 'lay,' non-academic dimension of alchemical experimentation in his particular household with many examples from their private letters. Chapter Four is a case study for the collaboration between Batthyány and Carolus Clusius, one of the most outstanding naturalists of his time, to see

how the friendship between two individuals could have a long-lasting effect on the whole of botany.

In order to keep the biographical narrative flowing, much of the argumentation based on sources and literature is confined to the notes. The reader who would like to know why I chose certain biographical data against others will find the explanation in the notes, while readers less keen on details will not be constantly interrupted by such digressions. At the end of the book I have placed appendices to ease following the chronological narrative as well as the many names of family members frequently mentioned in connection with Boldizsár Batthyány's biography: a genealogy of the family and a timeline of the events in his life. A third appendix contains the list of books on natural philosophy Batthyány had in his library the way they appear in the reconstructed library catalogue.[18]

Throughout the book, personal names will be first used in the form in which they were used most. This usually corresponds to the nationality of the person, however, very often the national identity is either not clear or it has been used in more than one form to the same degree. Therefore, at the first mention of a name other occurring forms and an English translation, when appropriate, shall be provided in brackets. However, I will stick to the use of one name for each person, using the most common variant. With Hungarian aristocrats this would most likely be the name they are known as today and, in this case, no Latin form will be provided (presented as simply Batthyány or Nádasdy). On the other hand, personages in the intellectual world, and particularly those who had published work, will be mentioned first in Latin and only then in the vernacular form of their names (Carolus Clusius rather than Charles de l'Écluse, and Rembertus Dodonaeus instead of Rembert Dodoens). I will not turn non-English names into English (instead of Balthazar, I will stick to the Hungarian version, Boldizsár).

Place names also require careful treatment. Most of the Batthyány lands were already inhabited by more than one ethnic group in Boldizsár's time. For this reason, they have always been known by at least two names, a Hungarian and a German—such as Németújvár/Güssing. In such cases, I took the liberty of using the Hungarian variant even if the place today is no longer part of Hungary because it was in Batthyány's Hungary (in this case I will indicate in brackets which country it is part of today). In the same way I intend to use Pozsony rather than Bratislava, while the name of other important European cities will be given in English (Vienna and not Bécs or Wien).

CHAPTER ONE

A FORTUNATE YOUTH IN UNFORTUNATE TIMES

You too, my lord, should do all you can
for the survival of your country
—Ferenc Nádasdy to Boldizsár Batthyány

From Pre-Adamic Garden to Battlefield: Hungary in the Sixteenth Century

At the end of his *Hungaria*, a historical work written in 1536 under the spell of the Hun leader Attila, Miklós Oláh (Nicolaus Olahus, then secretary to the regent of the Low Countries Mary of Hungary), sums up the attractions his country (and he himself) take pride in. Reading his eloquent and evocative lines, a foreigner could be seized by an irresistible desire to visit this fairyland, and rejoice in the natural riches the country has to offer.

> "Hungary thus abounds in all things which are considered necessary for both human life and making a fortune; its soil is black, fat, and damp since it yields heavy crops with minimal cultivation . . . There is such an abundance of pheasants, forest- and field-partridges, grouses, fieldfares and other types of noble birds that Hungary in this regard apparently does not lack anything . . . Cattle provide food not only for all the territories around Venice in Italy, but also for Austria, Moravia, Bavaria, the Swabian Principality and the peoples throughout Germany right to the Rhine . . . There is quite a plenty of gold, silver, iron, copper, tin, vitriol, marble, both red and white. Hungarians also have their own alabaster, and even some lead."[19]

While allowing that the description is somewhat biased, Oláh's words reflect an idealised state of affairs before the advent of darker times inducing the fall of the capital Buda to the Ottomans, and the subsequent division of the kingdom. His *Hungaria* recalls an almost pre-Adamic

garden, a unity of lands which, even as the work was being written in Brussels in 1536, shows early signs of disintegration. The Kingdom of Hungary[20] was soon to become a complicated set of lands caught up in an intricate network of alliances, belonging to and claimed by several ruling houses and dynasties. In 1541, Buda, residence of the Hungarian kings for centuries, fell into the hands of the Ottoman sultan and remained occupied until the late seventeenth century. This loss completed the gruesome defeat the Hungarian nobility suffered at the Battle of Mohács in 1526, after which the remainder of the kingdom, instead of trying to reconquer lost territories, had to prepare for a long-term defence of what was left.[21]

Despite these difficulties, the Kingdom of Hungary continued to be a composite monarchy, one of the richest middle powers in medieval Europe.[22] Since 1102, kings of Hungary were automatically Kings of Croatia and Dalmatia as well, while many titles traditionally attached to the ruler's name—such as *Rama*, *Servia*, *Cumania*, or *Bulgaria*—expressed a claim over these often hardly definable territories.[23] Owing to their distance from the centre of the kingdom, some like Transylvania or Slavonia had their own governors—the 'voivode' and the 'ban' respectively—but did not enjoy full autonomy.

After 1526, this composite monarchy became part of a larger empire built up systematically by a family with dynastic aspirations: the Habsburgs.[24] When Ferdinand I was crowned, the large middle part of the Kingdom of Hungary was under Ottoman occupation, and it was understood that the sultan had no intention of halting until he conquered Vienna, the Red Apple (*kilil elma*). The relationship between the Habsburgs and their newly 'acquired' lands, such as Hungary, we are now aware, was both far more variable and highly complex. It is impossible to present the former as oppressors and the latter as a mere buffer-state.[25] Hungary was not a colony of the Habsburg Monarchy, nor was it exploited; it was considered a precious acquisition which, largely due to the natural riches Oláh described, served as a 'larder' that provided food for the rest of the empire, and a 'bastion of Christianity,' which played a crucial role in delaying the Ottoman advance into Europe. Hungary, in point of fact, somehow managed to keep its autonomy on many levels: it had never been made a 'hereditary land,' nor integrated into the Holy Roman Empire. The Habsburgs tried but in vain to claim the right of succession; Hungary continued to be an 'elector' country.

However, there is one part of Oláh's *Hungaria*, which, in the second half of the sixteenth century, slipped through the fingers of the Hungarian rulers. The Habsburgs, as kings of Hungary, could not prevent Transylvania from becoming a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire.

Transylvania's primary appeal was its minerals and precious metals. For the Frenchman Jacques Bongars, who travelled from Vienna through Transylvania to Constantinople,

> "The land of Transylvania is a hill-country surrounded on all sides by mountains like ramparts, abounding with wheat and wine. There is a plenitude of all kinds of ores. Even the rivers flow with gold which is sifted by people carefully recruited for this work."[26]

The survival of Hungary was a common interest of both the estates and the ruler. These conditions influenced the interactions between various members of the Habsburg Monarchy and the ruling dynasty, and substantially determined the conduct of many contemporaries, including both the Hungarian estates and Boldizsár Batthyány. A new narrative is necessary to show how and why Batthyány used his intellectual networking to 'passively resist' the central power.[27] Recent scholarship on the relationship between the Habsburg rulers and their subjects places emphasis on a series of compromises that fashioned a strong and practical 'centralisation,' rather than 'absolutism.'[28]

Hungary in this period found itself in the claws of two of the superpowers of the epoch, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire. Everyday life in Western Hungary and on the borderlands with the Ottoman Empire evolved around military matters, fortification works, patrolling, minor expeditions and counter-attacks.[29] Landlords whose possessions fell on the frontiers lived in a state of constant preparation and warfare. The male members of the Batthyány, Zrínyi (Zrinski) and Nádasdy families, those most exposed to the Ottoman threat, of necessity, were warriors. The envoy from Modena, Tommaso Dainero, writing in the late fifteenth century, remarked,

> "Hungarian noblemen are eager to fight and they constantly practice the handling of weapons; if they cannot pillage enemy territory, they plunder each other's lands. They are extremely thriftless and fond of splendour, so much so that if they themselves cannot afford it, they maraud the lower-rank people."[30]

As regards the image foreigners had of Hungarians, fortunately, few travellers shared the opinion of Otto, a twelfth-century Bishop of Freisingen:

> "The Hungarians are grim-faced, hollow-eyed, low-built, their attire is wild, and their language is barbarous, so one either has to blame destiny or

> praise divine forbearance for allowing these monsters—I would not call them men—to possess such a wonderful country."[31]

The Englishman Edward Brown, writing in 1685, offered a more positive depiction, albeit determined by military overtones.

> "Though the *Hungarians* want not Ingenuity, Industry, and sufficient parts for Learning, and Liberal Arts; yet have they been more addicted unto *Martial affairs*, then unto deep Learning: Even the *Bishops* and *Clergymen* proving stout *Soldiers*; and no less than six bishops were slain, with their king *Ludovicus*, in that fatal Battel of Mohatch"[32]

Brown pointed to a behaviour, the so-called 'Hungarian bravado' (*Magyar virtus*) which remained commonplace. This popular image viewed Hungarian noblemen primarily concerned with war, and while having the talent for it, not being particularly inclined towards culture. However, I hope to demonstrate, through the Hungarian count Boldizsár Batthyány, that sword and crucible both could be wielded by the same man.

Family Legends and the Years of Infancy

The biography of Boldizsár Batthyány is a story of some things we know, and that of which we do not know. Sources on sixteenth-century Hungary are like selected pieces in a jigsaw. If one were a chronicler in the service of later generations of the mighty Batthyány family, she might happily incorporate legends about her subject as: "the story of a genuinely great man, who wandered the world and saw many foreign lands, visited Queen Mary of Hungary who was regent of the Low Countries in Brussels, served the French King, and saw the execution of Huguenots in Amboise. He was honoured with a painting by the acclaimed painter Pieter Brueghel, studied at the renowned University of Paris, and then Padua, mastered many foreign languages and acquired an incomparable wisdom; married the daughter of the hero of Sziget—his beloved Dorica, played and greatly appreciated music, killed a great many heathens, defied the tyrants of Vienna, and made his own lands a cradle of learning and tolerance..."

The writer of these lines, however, set out to compose a scholarly account, and has to revisit and reassess the fictions that have long circulated in the traditional canon. To be sure, Boldizsár Batthyány spent some years away from his homeland, but he did not travel as widely as many of his noble contemporaries, and did not partake in the so-called

'university peregrination.' He may well have visited the court of Mary of Hungary, but not exactly when he was thought to have done so. He undoubtedly did witness in France cruelty against the Huguenots, but he probably did not receive a painting from Brueghel. And he was not one of the 'Paduans,' a group of Hungarians who went to study in the University of Padua.

In fact, he leaves us wondering when he was really born. The most plausible date is 1542. But this is based upon elusive pieces of testimony in the private correspondence of the Batthyány family,[33] in letters written by Katalin Svetkovics, great-aunt of Boldizsár to her husband, Ferenc and to Boldizsár's father, Kristóf.

Kristóf Batthyány (1500/1510–1570[34]), a man of sanguine temper and extravagant character, married Erzsébet Svetkovics, sister of Katalin, in 1537.[35] Innumerable letters survive in which his aunt or uncle reproach him for his ill behaviour, neglect of his sons, and un-Christian attitude towards his wife. Indeed, he seems to have chased Erzsébet away, since the Bishop of Győr, Pál Gregorianczi, personally intervened and begged him to make peace with her.[36] Nevertheless, Kristóf was far from being an uneducated man; his letters reveal a great interest in botany, medicine, and books,[37] even though his collecting methods were often questionable.[38]

In a letter dated 24 January 1542,[39] Katalin Svetkovics tells Kristóf Batthyány that her sister and his wife Erzsébet expect to give birth at any moment, and therefore cannot travel. A couple of months later she says she is delighted to hear that both mother and child are healthy and well.[40] The Latin phrases do not reveal the gender or name of this child, but other sources suggest that it was Boldizsár. When giving an account of Boldizsár Batthyány's premature death in 1590, Miklós Istvánffy, a historiographer who had long known the nobleman, writes to the botanist Carolus Clusius that Boldizsár died at the age of 48.[41] According to another source, the so-called Draskovich-note, he passed away when he was 47.[42] As early as 1540, we find mention of a nurse in connection with Erzsébet Svetkovics, but we learn nothing about the child.[43] Owing to high infant mortality, it is possible that Boldizsár was not the first child of the couple, just the first to survive beyond infancy. It was a custom to reuse the name of a dead child; thus there could have been other Boldizsár(s) before ours was born. Some scholars[44] argue that Batthyány could not have been born in 1542 because he is writing letters in Latin as early as 1549.[45] In these letters, written mostly from Zagreb (which regrettably are no longer available in the National Archives of Hungary), the young boy Boldizsár who was studying there with an Örvenczy offspring, reports to his father that he is getting better every day in writing and learning, and

asks for broad-cloth for his tutor. Knowledge of Latin for a seven-year-old boy, especially a bright one with private tutors, is not exceptional, nor impossible. The young Batthyány may well have written in Latin (which was the official language in Hungary until 1844).

Another semi-plausible theory suggests that Boldizsár was born in the autumn of 1537, the year his mother and father married. This is indeed the earliest possible date, since they were married in January 1537; in any case, in October the same year, Kristóf Batthyány, the young father apparently wrote that he had nothing with which to carry his child to Németújvár.[46] This date, however, contradicts the only contemporary statement made by a friend of the Batthyánys, the above-mentioned Istvánffy, who may have known the year of Batthyány's birth, and the child could well be one of the many infants who did not survive infancy.

Boldizsár Batthyány was born into one of the most powerful families in the Kingdom of Hungary. His great-uncle, Ferenc (1497–1566), was one of the prominent members of the rising Batthyány family, a man who made wise choices and enjoyed the friendship of the ruling elite.[47] He was educated in Vienna, and was on good terms with King Louis II, and later with Ferdinand I and Maximilian II.[48] Being a strongly built man, he was a celebrated contestant in courtly tournaments and his wedding to Katalin Svetkovics (1505/10–1575) took place at the court in 1524.[49] He was also one of the few who survived the Battle of Mohács in 1526, which claimed the lives of many Hungarian aristocrats, and of the young king himself.[50] The couple had close ties with Queen Mary and had been in correspondence with her for many years, even after she moved to Brussels.[51]

They did not have their own children but seem to have lived for the children of others, and so they took charge of the sons of their prodigal nephew Kristóf, Boldizsár and his younger brother Gáspár. They also turned their Németújvár court into an informal school where children of the Hungarian nobility received a religious and literary education. It is known that all three daughters of Miklós Zrínyi (Nikola Zrinski), Orsolya, Katalin, and Dorica—who was to become Boldizsár Batthyány's wife in 1566—were educated at Németújvár.[52]

The young Boldizsár's education was in good hands. Ferenc Batthyány, similar to many aristocratic contemporaries in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, was aware of the threat educated commoners posed in the competition for social advancement. As commoners were increasingly promoted at the imperial court, it was crucial for young aristocrats "to be prepared academically for the changing roles of courtier, warrior and landowner."[53] The academic preparation usually started with

private tutors, to be soon continued at the court of relatives where the young nobles could interact with social peers and where they also received a religious-moral education. For the male offspring, the next phase in training was the ruler's court, where they could start building their own patronage networks. After a couple of years spent at the imperial court, the young noblemen would embark on a 'cavalier's tour,' which included sporadic studies at universities abroad, service at foreign courts to further shape their "habitus towards courtly practices and values," and to "cultivate, in the process, an international network of friends and patrons."[54] Owing to his great-uncle's providence, Boldizsár Batthyány's education followed these guidelines to the letter.

The first of his private tutors were Mihály Antalffy[55] (Laztessinus), and then Mihály Pomagaics[56] (Pomagaić), and finally Bálint Faddi[57] (Valentinus Faddinus). They had travelled widely in Western Hungary, Croatia and Slavonia, commuting between Boldizsár's native Németújvár, Szalónak, and the Slavonian Vinica and Trakostyán (Trakoščan). His first tutor, Antalffy, accompanied the young boy to Zagreb, between November 1549 and January 1550, before they moved on to Vinica, and finally, to Vienna.

In September of 1550, Batthyány wrote that he was studying at Németújvár, and that Mihály Pomagaics was his tutor (*Michael Pomagaych est pedotriba noster*[58]). The old teacher, Pomagaics was of Croatian origin, and had much earlier taught Boldizsár's father, Kristóf.[59] He was very interested in botany, and it is most probably due to his influence that Boldizsár developed an interest in plants at an early age. In 1553, he asked for various plants from his father, and the same year, he reports to his father that they had to flee from Trakostyán because of the plague.[60] He quotes Virgil, *Incidit in Scillam, volens vitare Charybdym*, when he states that they cannot expect anything better in the lands nearby, but he promises to go home for Christmas.[61] At the same time, he asks his father to buy Philip Melanchton's *Grammatica* for him as this book is highly recommended by his tutor and indispensable for his studies.[62] It seems that his father was unwilling or slow to fulfil his wish, because a year later Boldizsár repeated his request for that and another, the *Proverbia Salomonis* with a commentary by the same Melanchton.[63] In the summer of 1554, a new teacher Bálint Faddi replaced the old tutor Pomagaics, who had either retired or passed away.[64]

It seems that Boldizsár's education by private tutors ended here; Bálint Faddi set about to build himself a new home and a fish pond in Németújvár.[65] Boldizsár—who must have been twelve years old at the time—informed his father that what he really wished to do was learn

languages other than Hungarian and Latin, which he already spoke with confidence, so that he could get ahead in the Viennese court. It is worthwhile to quote his words to illustrate how justified his claim was:

> "I beg you, magnificent lord, that if you care about me, for I am coming of age, allow me to fulfil my wish to acquire different kinds of languages. For if I stay at this court, I will not acquire and learn other languages than Latin and Hungarian, and thank Heaven, I have already achieved something in Latin. Now I wish to learn some other ones as well since I cannot think of anything more helpful in life, and, in addition to this, no one can present himself at the court of the King or of the Archduke better than one who uses a refined language. Therefore I strongly beg you, my lord, again and again, to kindly remember me."[66]

Before we start having doubts about the boy's age, we must consider that the idea may not have been exclusively his own. If we look behind the curtain, we may discover his uncle Ferenc suggesting this career-oriented request; he often emphasised the importance of both the German language and the royal court. In one letter to his nephew, Ferenc recommended that Kristóf should send Boldizsár to the Viennese court rather than to Italy, and his words on the superiority and usefulness of German and Latin as compared to Italian were repeated almost literally by Boldizsár just two months later.

> "Your magnificent lordship has learned that we have arranged for your son to go to the court of His Royal Majesty and you begged us not to do that, but to send him to Italy instead . . . our intention is rather to send your magnificence's son with Gyulay to Graz, to be instructed there because the children of many noblemen and magnates [are studying there], so that he may acquire the German and Latin languages, which are greatly superior to the Italian. Our Emperor, even though he knows it, more frequently speaks German than Italian; therefore we are extremely astonished by your magnificence's wish to send your son to Italy"[67]

Shortly afterwards, Boldizsár seeks to borrow his father's lute.[68] He explains that a relative, Tamás Pálffy, is spending some time in Németújvár and he then would be able to teach Boldizsár how to play that musical instrument which was very popular among his contemporaries. He probably spent the end of 1555 studying in Graz,[69] fulfilling at least some of his uncle's plans. He complains, however, about his cold room and asks his father for money to buy firewood. Although he mentions fellow students (*condiscipuli*), we should think of other private students like him, rather than a regular school class, since the Jesuit College of Graz, where

pupils could have studied together, was founded only in 1573.[70] For the following years we have scarce records, no hint as to where he may have spent the years 1557–58. His last letter to his father dates from 1556, when he was still in Graz. In it asking again for firewood and also a spear (*framea*),[71] the latter perhaps for physical education.

Probably soon afterwards, around 1557, Boldizsár spent a couple of years in the Viennese court, together with other young noblemen; among them we find a neighbour and friend, Ferenc Nádasdy[72] (1555–1604), the future "Black Bey," the admired, only son of the Palatine[73] Tamás Nádasdy[74] and Orsolya Kanizsai, as well as another neighbour and fellow fighter, György (or Juraj) Zrínyi,[75] son of Miklós. The custom was that boys from noble families first served as grooms and, upon reaching the appropriate age (which varied from case to case), were 'knighted' and turned into 'royal youth.' They were given the title *magnificus*, granted greater liberty, and were allowed to accompany the king on horseback. Very often this promotion was achieved through the intervention of a powerful friend or relative. In 1559, Boldizsár's mother asked the help of István Kility, captain of Németújvár, to intervene on behalf of her son, who, despite being taller and older than the rest of the boys, had still not become a royal youth. She begged him to say a few words in support of her son or to pay the right sum of money to the right person.[76] In general, the correspondence leaves the impression that Boldizsár and his brother Gáspár spent far more time with their tutors or with their uncle and aunt than with their mother and father. In later years, indeed, Boldizsár and Gáspár had serious quarrels with both their parents, and their loyalties seem to have lain with the godparents who brought them up.

Gáspár appears to be the younger brother, probably born in 1545, but this is also debatable.[77] In that year, in any case, Ferenc Batthyány writes about Kristóf's children in the plural (*liberorum*) and instructs him not to let his wife Erzsébet and the child travel alone because of the flooded rivers.[78] The same year Ferenc urges his nephew to have the baby baptised as soon as possible.[79] Baptism is mentioned again only in 1547 which excludes the possibility of referring to the five-year-old (or perhaps even older) Boldizsár, and thus there must have been another baby in the family.[80] From 1547 onwards, Gáspár stayed at his uncle's place while Boldizsár lived with his parents, at least for a while. In 1548, Gáspár was immobilised by smallpox,[81] but as he was able to move more and more freely, he made it difficult for anyone to look after him.[82] In the same year, Katalin wrote to let Kristóf Batthyány know that the child Boldizsár had returned from Vienna.[83] The couple, and primarily Katalin Svetkovics,

faithfully reported to the parents about the health of little Gáspár who stayed with them throughout 1549.[84]

A Cavalier's Tour

Judging by a remark made by the botanist Carolus Clusius, Boldizsár Batthyány eventually learned, apart from Hungarian, Latin, German, French, Italian, Spanish and Croatian languages,[85] and the imperial librarian, Hugo Blotius, also commented on his "talent for languages."[86] His knowledge of French is undoubtedly connected with the years he spent at the court of the French royal couple,[87] François II (1544–1560) and Mary Stuart (1542–1587).[88] We know that his great-uncle Ferenc, who moved comfortably in courtly circles, arranged this opportunity for Boldizsár through his connections. The young nobleman departed for France with a recommendation from Emperor Ferdinand I at the end of 1559,[89] only to return in 1561.[90]

These years mark the beginning of the bloody wars of religion in France between the Catholic and Protestant fractions.[91] Paris nevertheless remained a popular destination for young aristocrats from all over Europe. Equestrian techniques, for example, were best taught at the French royal court and in Florence.[92] The same time Boldizsár was polishing his manners and French, another ambitious young aristocrat, the German Count Wolfgang II von Hohenlohe, was also there to study the language.[93] In the course of their lives, these young men of disparate provenance seem to have developed surprisingly similar interests and tastes. Both became patron-practitioners, collected books, and shared a passion for natural philosophy—dedicating much of their free time and most of their incomes to alchemical experimentation. Batthyány and Hohenlohe are just random examples from a pool of young aristocrats in late sixteenth-century Europe from East to West, who were educated in a similar fashion and returned to their respective homes filled with the same ideas. It cannot be a coincidence that their interests developed after they attended the same places, the same cultural and political centres of Europe.

Paris, especially before the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, was home to many Protestant intellectuals and artists alike and among them the printers played a huge role in spreading new ideas. The printing press was a highly effective medium and they had a widespread network of connections with other Protestants in other cities which allowed them to receive first-hand information relevant both for private and business matters. One of the most relevant printing dynasties, the Wechels, was active in Paris from the 1520s, when Chrétien Wechel was the principal