

## INDIRECT DIPLOMACY ACROSS THE CONTINENT: THE MISSIONS OF ANTONIO RINCÓN AND HIERONYMUS ŁASKI IN THE 1520S<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

European politics in the 1520s were determined by the Valois-Habsburg competition for dominion over Italy and the Habsburg-Ottoman rivalry in the Central European region and the Mediterranean. In this complex situation, diplomatic actors played a crucial role in the decision-making process by gathering and transmitting information, preparing and forming alliances, as well as providing various services to nurture existing relations and create new ones. Yet, the individual agency of these actors is far from thoroughly explored in historiography. This contribution looks at the ways in which Antonio Rincón, the Spanish envoy of Francis I of France, and Hieronymus Łaski, the Polish envoy of John I of Hungary, established and nurtured contacts as well as gathered information in order to lay the foundations of a coalition against the Habsburgs. This actor-centred approach aims to shed light on the contribution of individual agency to anti-Habsburg diplomacy in the early sixteenth century.

**KEYWORDS:** anti-Habsburg diplomacy; Franco-Hungarian relations; Antonio Rincón; Hieronymus Łaski; individual agency.

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## DIPLOMACIA INDIRECTA EN TODA EUROPA: LAS MISIONES DE ANTONIO RINCÓN Y HIERONYMUS ŁASKI EN LA DÉCADA DE 1520

### RESUMEN

La política europea en la década de 1520 estuvo determinada por la competencia Valois-Habsburgo, por el dominio sobre Italia y la rivalidad Habsburgo-otomana en la región de Europa Central y el Mediterráneo. En esta compleja situación, los actores diplomáticos desempeñaron un papel crucial en el proceso de toma de decisiones al recopilar y transmitir información, preparar y formar alianzas, así como brindar diversos servicios para fomentar las relaciones existentes y crear otras nuevas. Sin embargo, esta agencia individual de estos actores está lejos de ser explorada a fondo en la historiografía. Esta contribución analiza las formas en que Antonio Rincón, el enviado español de Francisco I de Francia, y Hieronymus Łaski, el enviado polaco de Juan I de Hungría, establecieron y fomentaron contactos, así como recopilaron información para sentar las bases de una coalición contra los Habsburgo. Este enfoque centrado en los actores pretende arrojar luz sobre la contribución de la agencia individual a la diplomacia antihabsburgo a principios del siglo XVI.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** diplomacia anti-Habsburgo; relaciones franco-húngaras; Antonio Rincón; Hieronymus Łaski; agencia individual.

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### INTRODUCTION

In January 1528, Johannes Dantiscus (1485–1548), the ambassador of Sigismund I the Old of Poland (officially King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, r. 1506–1548) at the Spanish court in Castile, informed his king that “these French agents boast everywhere that your most serene Majesty with the most Christian king [Francis I of France, r. 1515–1547] have concluded a treaty through the mediation of Antonio Rincón who had deserted from the emperor [Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, r. 1519–1556] and obtained a repugnant name”.<sup>2</sup> Dantiscus referred to the anti-Habsburg Franco-Polish alliance of 1524 which consisted of two marriage agreements, one between Henri, the son of Francis and one of the Polish princesses; and one between Sigismund Augustus, the son of Sigismund and one of the French princesses.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Stanisław Górski, ed. *Acta Tomiciana: Epistole, legationes, responsa, actiones, res geste. Serenissimus Principis Sigismundi, ejus nominis primi, regis Polonie, magni ducis Lithuanie, Russie, Prussie Masovie domini*, vol. 10 (Poznań: Kórnicka Library, 1898) [hereafter AT 10], no. 48, 45–49, 47, “hic oratores Galli passim se jactarent Mtem. vram. serenissimam cum rege christianissimo arctum foedus confecisse, per medium Antonii Rinconis, qui hic alias quia a caesare defecit, turpe nomen obtinuit”.

<sup>3</sup> For the older literature of the topic, see Władysław Pociecha, “Zygmunt (Sigismund) 1, 1506–48”, in William F. Reddaway, ed., *The Cambridge History of Poland. From the origins to Sobieski (to 1696)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 300–321, 309; Kenneth M. Setton, “The Papacy and

Although this pact was ineffective due to Francis I's defeat at the Battle of Pavia and imprisonment by Charles V in early 1525, the note of Dantiscus proves that the Franco-Polish tie continued to be referenced in French diplomatic rhetoric across European courts.

The rivalry between Francis I of France and Charles I of Castile and Aragon began when the two monarchs competed for the title of the Holy Roman Empire after the death of Emperor Maximilian I (r. 1508–1519). This particular competition ended with Habsburg victory when Charles was elected as emperor in 1519, but their clash continued in the Italian Wars for dominion over the Italian peninsula.<sup>4</sup> Perceiving these developments as a Habsburg plan to achieve “universal monarchy”, Francis was eagerly searching for allies in order to counterbalance the growing power of his rival.<sup>5</sup> The 1524 Franco-Polish alliance and the 1528 Franco-Hungarian alliance were the French king's early attempts to counterbalance the increasing power of the House of Habsburg in the European continent. Labelled as “Eastern affairs”,<sup>6</sup> in the earliest works on Francis I's foreign relations, they preceded the king's well-known 1536 coalition with Sultan Suleiman I (r. 1520–1566) that proved to be the most effective and long-term strategy against the Habsburgs. The Franco-Ottoman treaty was based on *capitulations*, which is to say unilateral legal documents, granted by the sultan, permitting extraterritorial jurisdiction and providing commercial privileges and religious immunities for a non-Muslim power. Moreover, the agreement concerned a future military and political cooperation which had significant ramifications on the European diplomatic stage well into the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

The two former agreements with the Polish and Hungarian crowns had a prelude – the mission of Francis I's Castilian envoy, Antonio Rincón (d. 1541), in the region in 1522–1523. Despite being the protagonist of the French king's “Eastern

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the Levant (1204–1571)”, *Volume III: The Sixteenth Century to the Reign of Julius III* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1984), 312.

<sup>4</sup> For a fresh and detailed overview of the Italian Wars, see Christine Shaw and Michael Mallett, eds., *The Italian Wars 1494–1559: War, State and Society in Early Modern Europe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2019). For a broader study of contemporary geopolitics, see Jean-Michel Sallmann, *Géopolitique du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (1490–1618)* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Brendan Simms, *Europe: the struggle for supremacy, 1453 to the present* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 29–30. See also María José Rodríguez-Salgado, “Obeying the Ten Commandments: the First War between Charles V and Francis I, 1520–1529”, in *The World of Emperor Charles V*, eds. Wim Blockmans and Nicolette Mout (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences, 2004), 15–67, 15–16.

<sup>6</sup> For the use of the term, see Victor-Louis Bourrilly, “La première ambassade d'Antonio Rincon en Orient (1522–1523)”, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 2 (1900), 23–44; idem, “Les diplomates de François I<sup>er</sup>. Antonio Rincon et la politique orientale de François I (1522–1541)”, *Revue Historique* 113 (1913), 64–83; Ioan Ursu, *La politique orientale de François I<sup>er</sup>, 1515–1547* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1908).

<sup>7</sup> On the 1536 Franco-Ottoman alliance, see De Lamar Jensen, “The Ottoman Turks in Sixteenth Century French Diplomacy”, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985), 451–470; Jean Béranger, “La collaboration militaire Franco-Ottomane à l'époque de la Renaissance”, *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire* 68 (1987), 51–66; Géraud Poumarède, “Négociateur près la Sublime Porte. Jalons pour une nouvelle histoire des capitulations franco-ottomanes” in *L'invention de la diplomatie. Moyen Age-Temps modernes*, ed. Lucien Bély (Paris: PUF, 1998), 71–85; Édith Garnier, *L'alliance impie. François I<sup>er</sup> et Soliman le Magnifique contre Charles V* (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 2008), Christine Isom-Verhaaren, *Allies with the Infidel: The Ottoman and French Alliance in the Sixteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

politics” and one of the most proactive and skilful enemies of the Habsburgs during the twenty years of his diplomatic career, our knowledge is relatively limited on Rincón’s background that Victor-Louis Bourrilly once summarised as “obscurity surrounding his origin”, “adventurous character of his embassies”, and “tragic mystery of his end”.<sup>8</sup> Even the date and place of his birth are uncertain. Some sources state that he was a native of Medina del Campo, while others mention Valladolid.<sup>9</sup> His name was associated with the anti-Habsburg Revolt of the Comuneros, also known as the War of the Communities of Castile (*Guerra de las Comunidades de Castilla*), that took place in 1520–1521. It was suggested that he left Spain after Charles V had defeated the riot and decided to fight against the Habsburgs by other means. However, more recent research has pointed out that in the autumn of 1521, the Castilian had been working as the secret agent of Archduke Ferdinand, Charles V’s brother, organising soldiers and artillery in Hungary.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps insufficiently paid or having seen better opportunities elsewhere, Rincón left Ferdinand and looked for opportunities elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> The note on Rincón “who had deserted from the emperor” in the letter sent from Johannes Dantiscus to Sigismund I of Poland also suggests an exit from Habsburg service or might refer to the fact that the Castilian started to serve anti-Habsburg interests after leaving his Habsburg-ruled home.<sup>12</sup> In the summer of 1522, we find Rincón in England. In June 1522, Martin de Salinas, Archduke Ferdinand’s ambassador at the Holy Roman imperial court, sent a report from London about various pieces of English and European news to the Spanish nobleman Gabriel von Salamanca-Ortenburg, Ferdinand’s general treasurer and archchancellor. The letter includes a note on Rincón who “has come to London in search of money”, but Salinas doubted that he had been successful.<sup>13</sup> Since England and France had been in conflict since the outbreak of the fourth phase of the Italian Wars in 1521, it can be assumed that in 1522 Rincón arrived in London with the goal of offering his services and obtaining a commission, but being unsuccessful, he eventually left England and started to serve Francis I of France. The French king might have been impressed by the ambitious Spaniard who, at the beginning of his diplomatic career, had already gained

<sup>8</sup> Bourrilly, “La première ambassade d’Antonio Rincon en Orient (1522–1523)”, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ricardo González Castrillo, “Dos agentes de Francisco I de Francia: César Fragoso y Antonio Rincón”, *Chronica Nova* 42 (2016), 291–311, 302. González Castrillo refers to two works as sources of the historiographical claims of Medina del Campo and Valladolid, respectively: Philippe de Comynes, *Las memorias de Felipe de Comines, señor de Argenton, de los hechos y empresas de Luis undécimo y Carlos octavo, reyes de Francia. Traducidas del francés por don Juan Vitrian* (Amberes: Imprenta de Juan Meursio, 1643), 257b; and Juan de Mariana, *Historia general de España o continuación de la Historia de España de Juan de Mariana, de la continuación que escribió Joseph Manuel Miniana* (Amberes: Marcos Miguel Bousquet, 1737–1739), 204.

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard Rill, *Fürst u. Hof in Österreich. Von den habsburgischen Teilungsverträgen bis zur Schlacht von Mohács (1521/22 bis 1526)*, vol. 1: *Außenpolitik und Diplomatie* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1993), 13–19.

<sup>11</sup> Meghan Williams, “Re-Orienting a Renaissance Diplomatic Cause Celebre: the 1541 Rincon-Fregoso Affair”, in *A Divided Hungary in Europe: Exchanges, Networks, and Representations, 1541–1699*, ed. Szymon Brzeziński and Áron Zarnóczy (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), vol. 2, 11–30, 13–14.

<sup>12</sup> See note 2.

<sup>13</sup> G. A. Bergenroth, ed., “Spain: June 1522”, 16–30 in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, Volume 2, 1509–1525 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1866), British History Online <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/spain/vol2/pp434-447> [accessed 10 December 2024], 437.

experience in Castile, Flanders, and Hungary. His familiarity with Habsburg aims can also be regarded as a potential special value for the king of France. The remark made by Salinas also suggests that Habsburg diplomacy was vigilant in following Rincón's steps after he had left their service.

The Castilian envoy travelled there to collect intelligence regarding any potential interest in an anti-Habsburg alliance. After this early pursuit, Rincón became the protagonist of the French crown's ties with Krakow, Buda, and Constantinople for almost twenty years. In addition, his talks with members of the Hungarian political elite also preceded another diplomatic agreement, established in 1529 by the Polish envoy, Hieronymus Łaski (1496–1542), between John I of Hungary (r. 1526–1540) and Suleiman. John Szapolyai, elected king of Hungary as John I, opposed the parallelly elected Habsburg claimant to the Hungarian throne, Charles V's brother, Ferdinand I (r. 1526–1564).<sup>14</sup>

Hieronymus Łaski was a member of a Polish noble family and the nephew of Jan Łaski, Archbishop of Gniezno. Like several other young nobles in the period, Hieronymus studied in Italy with the support of his influential uncle. Richárd Botlik has suggested that the multilingual man was invited by John I to his service in early 1527 because it was well-known that Archbishop Jan Łaski was a leading figure among the anti-Habsburg Polish nobles.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, John I's mother, the Polish princess Hedwig of Cieszyn, also supported Jan Łaski, so the connections and shared interests of the two families made John's service a desirable and promising position for Hieronymus.<sup>16</sup> As will be shown in his article, Hieronymus Łaski's journey as a diplomatic actor was adventurous and often driven by his own initiatives. For instance, on 15 August 1527, the king stated that Hieronymus Łaski "eventually progressed to France and England in his [John's] name directly without our knowledge and will".<sup>17</sup> Based on this remark, we can presume that Łaski had a highly independent character and his decision to join John I was not approved by the Polish king. Nonetheless, by referring to Łaski's disobedience, Sigismund could have also expressed his wish to distance himself from John I, in order to preserve his neutral position in the power feud and not to risk the Habsburgs' retaliation.

<sup>14</sup> János Szapolyai is also known as John Zápolya, Ivan Zapolja, Ioan Zápolya, and Ján Zápoľský. I use his name in English (John) when referring to him after his coronation as John I of Hungary in 1526. On his family, figure, and reign, see Pál Fodor and Szabolcs Varga, eds., *A Forgotten Hungarian Royal Dynasty: The Szapolyais (Mohács 1526–2026: Reconstruction and Remembrance)* (Budapest: Research Centre for the Humanities, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Richárd Botlik, "Az 1531. évi krakkói alku (Titkos megállapodás az I. Ferdinánd párti erdélyi területek katonai utánpótlásának kérdéséről)" [The Krakow bargain of 1531 (Secret agreement on the issue of the military supply of the Transylvanian territories in favour of Ferdinand I)] *Századok* 137 (2003), 579–601, 583–584.

<sup>16</sup> See Waclaw Urban, "Hieronim (Jarosław) Łaski" in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XVIII (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1973), 255.

<sup>17</sup> Stanisław Górski, ed. *Acta Tomiciana: Epistole, legationes, responsa, actiones, res geste. Serenissimus Principis Sigismundi, ejus nominis primi, regis Polonie, magni ducis Lithuaniae, Russie, Prussie Masovie domini* (Poznań: Kórnicka Library, 1876), no. 247, 250, "demum in Galliam et Angliam ejus nomine profectum esse prorsus absque ulla scientia et voluntate nostra".



Historians have argued that in the course of the 1520s, Francis I did not intend to ally with the sultan yet. Gábor Barta has emphasised that the French ruler aimed to challenge Habsburg supremacy by approaching the Polish and Hungarian kings.<sup>18</sup> Attila Györkös has pointed out that Francis had followed the Christian principles of European diplomacy in the 1520s and turned to the Porte only in the mid-1530s.<sup>19</sup> In addition to looking for potential allies with anti-Habsburg geopolitical interests, the king of France paid attention to the confessional conflicts that fuelled political antagonism within the Holy Roman Empire. Paula S. Fichtner claimed that Francis turned to Suleiman for help after his unsuccessful attempt to gain support from the German Lutheran princes who were opposing the Catholic emperor.<sup>20</sup> Focusing on Rincón's missions, it was Victor-Louis Bourrilly who stated that Antonio Rincón's embassy was supposed to ensure the freedom of action of Hungarian and Bohemian<sup>21</sup> lords and excite them against the Habsburgs by promising the support of the King of France.<sup>22</sup> Since this piece was written in 1900, no thorough attention has been paid to the nature of this diplomatic encounter.

From a methodological point of view, scholars of political and diplomatic history have shifted their attention from the analysis of the “institution” of diplomacy to the “agents” of foreign relations, by analysing their characters, behaviours, interactions, and services. Notably, Tracey Sowerby and Jan Hennings have called for the acknowledgement of the role that practices and encounters played in diplomatic history and discussed several aspects that were given a marginal place in conventional historiography. They have stressed that the diplomatic agents' status, attitude, and communication better illuminate the core features of pre-modern princely interactions than their hands-on influence over political and military events.<sup>23</sup>

The purpose of this contribution is to analyse and compare Antonio Rincón's talks with members of the Hungarian political elite in 1522 and Hieronymus Łaski's negotiation with the Ottoman Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha in Constantinople in 1527–1528. It will also assess their significance in light of the developments in Franco-Hungarian and Hungarian-Ottoman relations in the late 1520s. First, I investigate the events of 1522, and second, those of the period 1526–1529. In doing so, it aims to problematise the term “indirect diplomacy” and demonstrate that the role of such encounters in pre-modern foreign affairs was more complex than it is often recognised.

<sup>18</sup> Gábor Barta, *A Sztambulba vezető út, 1526–1528* [The road that led to Istanbul, 1526–1538] (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1983), 133–149.

<sup>19</sup> Attila Györkös, “Mohács és a török-francia szövetség, avagy a Nyugat árulásának mítosza” [Mohács and the Turkish-French alliance, or the myth of the betrayal of the West], in *A magyar emlékezőhelyek kutatásának elméleti és módszertani alapjai* [Theoretical and methodological bases of the research of Hungarian memorial sites], ed. Pál S. Varga et al. (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2013), 339–351.

<sup>20</sup> Paula S. Fichtner, *Ferdinand I of Austria: the politics of dynasticism in the age of the reformation* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1982), 100.

<sup>21</sup> Louis II of Hungary was also king of Bohemia between 1516–1526.

<sup>22</sup> Bourrilly, “La première ambassade d'Antonio Rincon en Orient (1522–1523)”, 25.

<sup>23</sup> See Tracey Sowerby and Jan Hennings, eds., *Practices of diplomacy in the early modern world, c.1410–1800* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1–21.

## BUILDING TRUST AND GATHERING INFORMATION

Treatises dedicated to the subject of the ideal ambassador, the first of which was the Venetian Ermolao Barbaro's 1490 work titled *De officio legati*, shed light on the expected relationship of trust mainly between the lord and the envoy. One author in the 1570s claimed that the ambassador had to be “adorned with all virtues required, and commendable, in a good man, and unfurnished of any vice to blemish his credit, or that may win him the Surname of a wicked man”.<sup>24</sup> However simplistic such descriptions may sound, it is obvious, at least in theory, that an envoy had to be creditable and honourable as a representative of royal will and interest – both to maintain his lord's trust in his loyalty and to build trust in the people he approached for help or information. The agent had to establish and nurture new and existing ties in both directions both with his “home” and “abroad” communities and networks, because of the long distances and the slow communication that essentially characterised his work. He dealt with a series of delicate issues, used and relied on oaths and promises, as well as gathered and conveyed all sorts of accurate and false information. The envoy had to travel across huge distances to unfamiliar environments, and in many cases, were obliged to “improvise” and diverge from the initial guidelines they received from his lord. The deft use of verbal and non-verbal tools was a prerequisite for building confidence in all kinds of interactions.<sup>25</sup> Analysing the double task of creating and maintaining trust in two directions, therefore, reveals information on the actual experiences, tasks, skills, and challenges of the envoys.

The first case study of this article is centred around the report Antonio Rincón wrote about his mission in Hungary and Poland<sup>26</sup> – he sent it in April 1523 from Venice to Guillaume Gouffier, *seigneur de Bonnivet*, Admiral of France and head of the French army in Italy.<sup>27</sup> In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Franco-Hungarian relations were rather sporadic.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Rincón's mission can be considered an attempt at trust-building and information-gathering. The report helps us reconstruct the different steps of his journey in 1522–1523. He intended to talk to King Louis II (r. 1516–1526) – whose mother was Anne of Foix-Candale, a member

<sup>24</sup> Francis Thynne, *The application of certain histories concerning ambassadours and their functions* (London, 1652), 14. M. S. Anderson has claimed that this book was in fact completed in 1578, see M. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (London: Routledge, 1993), 26, n. 62.

<sup>25</sup> For the relatively recent field of research on trust, see Badeloch Noldus, “Loyalty and Betrayal: Artist-agents Michel le Blon and Pieter Isaacs, and Chancellor Axel Oxenstiern”, in *Your Humble Servant: Agents in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Hans Cools, Marika Keblusek, and Badeloch Noldus (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2006), 51–64; Ian Forrest and Anne Haour, eds., “Trust in Long-Distance Relationships, 1000–1600 CE”, *Past & Present* 238 (2018), 190–213; Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz, “The concept of language of trust and trustworthiness: (Why) history matters”, *Journal of Trust Research* 10 (2019), 91–107.

<sup>26</sup> AN, J 964, No. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Léon Jacques Maxime Prinnet, “Bonnivet, Guillaume Gouffier, Seigneur de”, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. 4, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Hugh Chisholm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 212–213.

<sup>28</sup> Attila Györkös, “Francia-magyar diplomáciai kapcsolatok (1499–1529)” [Franco-Hungarian diplomatic relations (1499–1529)], *Világtörténet* 11 (43) (2021), 517–530.

of the French nobility and Queen consort of Hungary and Bohemia between 1502–1506.<sup>29</sup> Upon arriving in Hungary, Rincón did not find Louis at the court of Buda as the king was staying in his other court in Bohemia at that time. Nonetheless, the envoy met and talked to a number of influential members of the Hungarian aristocracy. Then, he travelled to Krakow to meet with Sigismund I of Poland.<sup>30</sup> Rincón made no formal agreement in Hungary, mainly because Louis II was not present, but also because the House of Jagiellon had dynastic relations with the Habsburgs, so an anti-Habsburg alliance could not be considered a political reality. The 1515 marriage treaty between the Houses of Jagiellon and Habsburg arranged the unions between Ferdinand, the grandson of Emperor Maximilian I, and Anne, the daughter of King Vladislaus II of Hungary (r. 1490–1516), as well as between Mary, Maximilian's daughter, and Louis, Vladislaus's son.<sup>31</sup> These agreements brought the Habsburgs one step closer to the Hungarian throne, which was reinforced by the fact that Maximilian, along with Sigismund I of Poland, became the royal guardians of Louis after the death of Vladislaus in 1516.<sup>32</sup> But since Rincón succeeded in approaching leading figures of the Hungarian elite, we can assume that he was able to draw conclusions about local power relations and the French court was able to make use of this knowledge.

Despite not being able to meet the king, Rincón proved to be a resourceful agent. In the absence of the monarch, he approached and conversed with three aristocrats – János Bornemissza, the Castellan of Buda and Louis II's lieutenant; György Szatmári, Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary,<sup>33</sup> and János Szapolyai, Voivode of Transylvania.<sup>34</sup> This step demonstrates Rincón's aim to map any traces of factionalism that could be exploited for the sake of French interests. He did not mention in his report how he decided who he would be talking to. This fact may be interpreted as a decision not to disclose his contacts and network.

Although the three Hungarian lords were pleased to receive Rincón and assured him of their support, we can observe a certain extent of distrust in the description of these talks since they did not give him any written or verbal agreement

<sup>29</sup> Attila Györkös, "Egy francia nő Budán. Anna királyné, II. Ulászló felesége (1502–1506)" [A French woman in Buda. Queen consort Anne, Vladislaus II's wife (1502–1506)], in *Királynék a középkori Magyarországon és Európában [Queen consorts in medieval Hungary and Europe]*, ed. Kornél Szovák and Attila Zsoldos (Székesfehérvár: Városi Levéltár és Kutatóintézet, 2019), 173–185.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, 518–519.

<sup>31</sup> Alois Niederstätter, *Das Jahrhundert der Mitte. An der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit. Österreichische Geschichte 1400–1522* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1996), 172–174. See also Zsuzsanna Hermann, *Az 1515. évi Habsburg-Jagielló szerződés. Adalékok a Habsburgok magyarországi uralmának előkészítéséhez [The 1515 Habsburg-Jagiellon treaty. Data on the preparation for the Habsburgs' reign in Hungary]* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1961), 42–43.

<sup>32</sup> A conference in April 2015 dealt with Jagiellon dynastic and diplomatic relations in a European context – see Attila Bárány, Attila Györkös, and Ádám Novák, eds., *The Jagiellonians in Europe: Dynastic Diplomacy and Foreign Relations* (Debrecen: Hungarian Academy of Sciences – University of Debrecen, 2016). *Jagiellonians: Dynasty, Memory and Identity in Central Europe* was a major research project at the University of Oxford funded by the European Research Council between 2013–2018 – see the project website <https://jagiellonians.web.ox.ac.uk/>

<sup>33</sup> The primate is the highest office in the Catholic Church in Hungary.

<sup>34</sup> Bourrilly, "La première ambassade d'Antonio Rincon en Orient (1522–1523)", 23–44; Györkös, "Francia-magyar diplomáciai kapcsolatok (1499–1529)", 23.



to his proposals. The Castilian did receive some reassuring words regarding the anti-Habsburg position of the nobles. For instance, János Bornemissza said to Rincón that “he remained a devoted servant of His Very Christian Majesty, ready to do anything against the House of Austria, provided he had support”.<sup>35</sup> But he redirected the French envoy to the Polish court stating that Sigismund I of Poland “was the foundation without which no one in Hungary could move”.<sup>36</sup> This step can have two interpretations. First, the lords considered Sigismund I of Poland the most important monarch in the region without whom no change in European politics could be achieved. It also suggests that the young Louis II was not considered among his elite politically influential enough for such a bold enterprise. Second, Rincón was not able to convince them of a potential coalition’s benefits and they did not want Louis II or themselves to be involved in an alliance that had a highly dubious outcome.

Antonio Rincón was able to perceive that some interlocutors were more trusting and willing than others and pointed out the differences between their reactions and responses accordingly. He was not able to force any decision on the lords but appreciated any sign of support for or common interest with the king of France. After his meeting with János Bornemissza, Rincón visited György Szatmári, Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary, and had a lengthy discussion with him in his country house. He found Szatmári less determined than Bornemissza, “perhaps due to being ecclesiastical”.<sup>37</sup> In his report, the envoy did not conceal from the Admiral of France that even though Szatmári also seemed to be supportive of the “practice”, that is to say negotiations with the French king for a league against the House of Habsburg, and begged Rincón not to give up on his “blessed purpose”, “he [Szatmári] was not without fear”.<sup>38</sup> This remark testifies to the relevance of emotions in diplomatic interaction, the extent of mutual trust in particular, since the archbishop’s reserved behaviour made Rincón more careful. He admits in his account that “I did not give him [Szatmári] His Very Christian Majesty’s letter, because it seemed good to me not to frighten him more”.<sup>39</sup> Szatmári’s fear of the repercussions of his own involvement in any potential collaboration against the Habsburgs can be better understood when taking into account the Hungarian court’s relatively limited experience of dealing with the French and Francis I in particular, as well as the geopolitical circumstances of the early 1520s. As pointed out above, the House of Jagiellon on the Hungarian throne was dynastically tied to the House of Habsburg, change only came with the Ottoman victory at Mohács in 1526.

Antonio Rincón’s journey in Poland, as described in his report, had some similarly unexpected and promising episodes. Sigismund I was not residing at the court

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<sup>35</sup> AN, J 964, No. 20, fol. 1, “in fine rresto servitór et aficionato de la Magt Xma parato a far ogni cosa contra la casa de Austria, avendo spalle”.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, fol. 1, “me conforto andár al Ser[enissi]mo rre de Polonia, che colui era il fundamento senza il qualle nixuno in Ungaria se moveria; e con questo, me parti de lui”.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, fol. 1, “forse per eser eclesiastico”.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, fol. 1, “la pratica le piaceva”, “me pregho no desistesse de mio santo proposito”, “no rresto senza paura”.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, fol. 1, “pero, nó li dete la litera de su Magt Xma per che cusi me parse che bigsoyava per allora per no alterarlo piu”.

of Krakow as he was negotiating a truce with the Principality of Muscovy in his other realm, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. As the envoy claimed, he met one of Sigismund's lord palatines and lieutenants who was so devoted to Francis I of France, the "most Christian king", that he offered Rincón "the greatest honours, [...] horses, one of his gentlemen to accompany me and serve me until I met the king [Sigismund]".<sup>40</sup> Such remarks in Rincón's account demonstrate that he was attentive to individuals who showed a liking for the king of France and his interests.

Regardless of the results of his meetings with the Hungarian nobles, Rincón made use of these encounters in his speech given to King Sigismund in Vilnius, Lithuania. He reminded the king of the "intrigues" and "deception" prepared by Charles V and his brother, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria.<sup>41</sup> The allegations were carefully built upon the existing anti-Habsburg sentiments of the Polish court which derived from the rapprochement between Emperor Charles V and Vasili III, Grand Duke of Moscow (r. 1502–1533). Furthermore, Rincón portrayed in his talk with Sigismund the meetings with Bornemissza, Szatmári, and Szapolyai as a French royal strategy aimed at encouraging leading members of the Hungarian elite "to fully adhere to" the Polish ruler for their own and their kingdom's sake.<sup>42</sup> By doing so, the Castilian envoy positioned the Polish king as the leading power in the region who had authority over his nephew, Louis II of Hungary. In this context, the "indirect" contacts were used for rhetorical purposes.

One of Rincón's Hungarian contacts, János Szapolyai, re-surfaced in Rincón's conversation with Sigismund, this time in Krakow. As he reported to Admiral Bonnivet "the conversation fell on the voivode of Transylvania, and it is said that in the affairs of Hungary, he is a person of great importance and asked [Rincón] if he wanted to go him [Szapolyai]".<sup>43</sup> The Hungarian lord's sister, Barbara Szapolyai, was King Sigismund's late first wife, who died in 1515, and the mother of his first child, Hedwig. Upon reaching the French court, Rincón's observation must have established Francis I's view of János Szapolyai as a promising and capable potential ally in his future diplomatic aspirations. Of course, French diplomacy could not have foreseen the Battle of Mohács and its crucial consequences on Hungarian politics in 1523. Arguably, a crucial part of the remit of sending envoys to foreign courts was to gather as varied information as possible, not just to carry out direct negotiations about a specific issue, but to have as broad an idea as possible about political forces, factions, and antagonism, for possible future use.

Upon his return to Hungary from Poland, Rincón carried letters from King Sigismund and Krzysztof Szydłowiecki, Great Chancellor of the Crown and Castellan of Krakow, to the Hungarian lords. During this second visit, he gathered further information on them and conveyed the news to the Admiral of France. He reiterated

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, fol. 1, "me fece grandissimo honór, me dete cavalli, me dete un gentilohomo suo che me acompagnase et servese fin a dove trovase il rre".

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, fol. 2, "etiam per avisar le machinacioni et fraudi che li doi fratelli cio e Carrolo e Fernando tra tan et ordinan de far".

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, fol. 2, "voleseno in tuto aderir a la Serenita Vostra".

<sup>43</sup> AN, J 964, No. 20, fol. 4, "voltarono il parlare sopra il vayvoda de Transilvania, dicendo che in le cose de Ungaria questo e gran parte; demandareno me se io volea andar de lui".

that György Szatmári, Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary, was too cautious in political matters and less powerful than János Szapolyai, Voivode of Transylvania, who supposedly “inherited the fourth of the Kingdom of Hungary in patrimony, in addition to his estates and offices”.<sup>44</sup> In addition, we can observe an additional level of indirect diplomatic cooperation, that is to say diplomacy beyond the royal court, within Rincón’s newly established network. The Castilian noted that János Bornemissza, the Castellan of Buda and Louis II’s lieutenant, informed him that he should avoid Buda at all costs because the other Hungarian lords arriving for the diet (assembly) were suspicious of him. Rincón stated that although no one knew of his pursuits with the exception of Bornemissza, Szatmári, and Szapolyai, there were many “Germans” at the court who could harm him. Rincón opted to go to Venice, where he arrived safely, thanks to the advice of Bornemissza and Szatmári.<sup>45</sup>

This helpful behaviour, however, appears in a different light when we take into account that shortly after their meeting János Bornemissza sent news about his conversation with Rincón to Andrea dal Burgo, Charles V’s envoy, who was residing at that time with Louis II in Prague – and Burgo forwarded the news to Archduke Ferdinand of Austria.<sup>46</sup> As András Kubinyi pointed out, Bornemissza showed curiosity and willingness to all the foreign envoys who approached him, and thus, he was often portrayed in their reports as a “friend”.<sup>47</sup> Shifting allegiances, which is to say serving (or pretending to serve) several lords and changing sides (sometimes multiple times) in order to benefit the most from internal power struggles as well as great power conflicts, was a common practice in sixteenth-century Hungary. It is difficult to judge the real affiliation of such lords, and it might be safe to say that their primary goal was to gain as much political and financial advantages as possible. This pattern further complicates the notion of trust in our context and underlines the importance of individuals’ agency.

Rincón’s account provides an insight into his navigation in the politics of foreign monarchies and his way of familiarising himself with local power relations. His words testify to the great confidence he had in the success of his mission to Hungary and Poland. But this confidence was not supported by tangible achievements. He concluded that thanks to the promising talks with Sigismund and the eager Hungarian lords whom he found, “with little effort and little expense”, French diplomacy would be able to turn the two kingdoms against the Habsburgs.<sup>48</sup> This mission explored signs of enmity against the Habsburgs and provided the French court with intelligence regarding the power relations between the Hungarian and Polish monarchs as well as within their respective courts. As the envoy emphasised in his conclusion, the majority

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, fol. 6, “il vayvoda, che dicen che a la qua[rte parte] del regno de Ungaria de patrimonio, senza li tenuti et officii”.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, fol. 6.

<sup>46</sup> HHSA, Grosse Correspondenz. 25/a. 1523. III. 14.

<sup>47</sup> András Kubinyi, “A magyar állam belpolitikai helyzete Mohács előtt” [The domestic political situation of the Hungarian state before Mohács], in *Mohács. Tanulmányok a mohácsi csata 450. évfordulója alkalmából* [Mohács. Studies on the occasion of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Mohács], ed. Lajos Ruzsák and Ferenc Szakály (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 78–80.

<sup>48</sup> AN, J 964, No. 20, fol. 7, “con poca fatica e poca spesa”.

of the lords of Hungary regarded King Sigismund “as a god”.<sup>49</sup> This early visit served as an opportunity for him to get acquainted with the members of the Polish and Hungarian political elite and gather information to be possibly used in the future. These ties involved indirect conversations to map the interests, concerns, and inclinations of actors who possessed political potential.

On the one hand, Rincón’s status as a rebel subject of Charles V might have influenced his capability to construct trust across Europe due to potential concerns regarding his shifting allegiance. On the other hand, as a lower-rank actor in the early 1520s gave him some leeway when travelling from one court to another, contacting influential individuals, and trying to gather information. A higher-rank actor would have been more likely to be spotted and trigger suspicion. In addition, Rincón’s growing familiarity with various power relations and political scenarios also gradually increased his status in French diplomacy and in the eyes of those who were interested in the creation of an anti-Habsburg network. It cannot be a coincidence that after the election of the Ottoman-supported John I, it was Antonio Rincón who was sent by the French king to revive former conversations and establish an alliance against the Habsburg brothers.

## ESTABLISHING AGREEMENTS

Antonio Rincón’s mission in the early 1520s in Hungary and Poland gained political relevance in the second half of the decade. In the second case study of this contribution, I analyse how John I’s anti-Habsburg cooperation unfolded with Sultan Suleiman and Francis I. I examine these developments through the lens of the personal activities and contacts of Antonio Rincón and Hieronymus Łaski.

In August 1526, Sultan Suleiman I crucially defeated the Christian army at the Battle of Mohács where even King Louis II lost his life. A few months later, two kings were elected – János Szapolyai as John I, favoured by Sultan Suleiman and the majority of the nobility, and Archduke Ferdinand of Austria as Ferdinand I, supported by his brother, Emperor Charles V as well as other lords at the Hungarian royal court.<sup>50</sup> The conflict between the two claimants to the throne and the subsequent civil war provided a new opportunity for French diplomacy, and Rincón’s endeavours proved to be more fruitful this time. In May 1526, three months later, a new coalition, the League of Cognac, was founded by the Kingdoms of France and England, the Republics of Venice, Milan, and Florence, and the papacy, who aimed at confining Habsburg power over Europe which had been increasing after Charles V’s victory at Pavia in 1525. This is the context in which Antonio Rincón left France for Hungary for the second time in late February 1527, on behalf of Francis I and the League of Cognac, with the aim

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<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, fol. 7, “nó solamente e potente de se ma etiam tuti ii S[ignori de Unga]ria, o la magior parte le tenen come un Dio etiam”.

<sup>50</sup> For a recent, thorough, and interdisciplinary discussion on the Battle of Mohács, see Szabolcs Varga, ed., *Elsüllyedt Mohács – Újabb tanulmányok a mohácsi csatával kapcsolatos kutatások eredményeiből* [Sunken Mohács – New studies from the results of research related to the Battle of Mohács] (Budapest: Martin Opitz Kiadó, 2023).

of offering anti-Habsburg help and a marriage alliance to John I. He arrived in Buda in June that year.

In his letter carried by Rincón, Francis I expressed his sadness at the disaster at Mohács and exhorted the newly crowned King John to protect his right to the throne by promising the support of the Cognac League.<sup>51</sup> In his letter dated 3 July 1527, Rincón informed Andrea Gritti, Doge of the Venetian Republic (r. 1523–1538), about his arrival in Buda and the situation he found in the Hungarian capital. Rincón wrote that he was received by the Hungarian king and lords “as if he had come from heaven”.<sup>52</sup> The envoy mentioned that he was about to travel to Sigismund I as the king of Poland was willing to contribute to the anti-Habsburg endeavours.<sup>53</sup> He presumably based this statement on the negotiations he had had with Sigismund five years before. Consequently, the French crown still tried to secure Polish support even after the failure of the 1524 Franco-Polish alliance. In his response, John I asked the king of France “to work for the good of our kingdom in such a way as for yours and to be towards us like a friend, confederate, father, relative, and patron”.<sup>54</sup> Of course, John did not forget to ask Francis to send him the greatest possible amount of money.<sup>55</sup> As Marino Sanuto, the Venetian historian and diarist summarised, this French mission to Buda was perceived to be very productive in European diplomatic circles.<sup>56</sup>

The events of the period 1527–1529 connected the anti-Habsburg interests of Francis I, John I, and Sultan Suleiman, and the diplomatic endeavours of the three monarchs were tied together by the activities of a few individuals. On 23 September 1527, Antonio Rincón sent a letter to Anne, Duke of Montmorency, Grand Master of France and head of Francis I’s household, to ask for money from the French court in

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<sup>51</sup> Francis I to John I on 24 February 1527 (wrongly dated as 1526) in Ernest Charrière, ed., *Négociations de la France dans le Levant, ou Correspondances, mémoires et actes diplomatiques des ambassadeurs de France à Constantinople et des ambassadeurs, envoyés ou résidents à divers titres à Venise, Raguse, Rome, Malte et Jérusalem, en Turquie, Perse, Géorgie, Crimée, Syrie, Égypte, etc., et dans les États de Tunis, d’Alger et de Maroc*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1848), 155–158, 155. “Quamobrem pro nostra in vos benevolentia hortamur presentim alacrique animi o jus vestrum tueamini, presertim cum in mentem venerit summum pontificem, potissimum Anglie regem, Venetorum rempublicam ac nos imprimis auxilio vestro nequaquam esse defuturos, tum vestra ipsius causa, tunc ne adversarius vester”. The manuscript can be found in BnF, Collection Dupuy, No. 468.

<sup>52</sup> Federico Stefani et al., eds., *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, vol. 45 (Venice: Visentini, 1896), col. 546, “Io fui receputo da questo Serenissimo re et da tutti signori hongari come se venisse dal cielo”. Rincón is quoted in the first-person singular as a copy of his letter to Gritti was inserted in Sanuto’s *I diarii*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, col. 547, “Io mi partirò presto al re di Polonia, il quale è una cosa medema con questo Re, per confirmarlo che voglia aiutarlo come ho commissione dal Christianissimo re mio”.

<sup>54</sup> John I of Hungary to Francis I of France in Buda on 6 July 1527, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica 1. Diplomataria. 5: Magyar Történelmi Okmánytár, londoni könyv- és levéltárakból* [Hungarian Historical Documents from libraries and archives in London], 1521–1717, ed. Ernő Simonyi (Pest [today Budapest]: Eggenberger, 1859), no. 21, 134–137, 135, Votre Majesté est priée de travailler pour le salut de notre royaume dans telle mode que pour le votre même et qu’elle soit envers nous comme un ami, confédéré, père, parent et patron”. The manuscript can be found in BL, Bibliotheca Cottoniana, Vespasianus, F. I., no. 76.

<sup>55</sup> Ursu, *La politique orientale*, 43.

<sup>56</sup> Stefani et al., eds., *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, vol. 45, col. 671, “L’andata di l’orator del re christianissimo a quella Maiestà era stata molto fruttuosa”.



order to be able to help John I who had been attacked by Ferdinand I's troops.<sup>57</sup> On 27 September, John's army was defeated by the Habsburg forces at the Battle of Tokaj. At the same time, Hieronymus Łaski, John I's Polish envoy, embarked on a mission to Constantinople with the goal of requesting anti-Habsburg support from the sultan. At the Ottoman court, Łaski had a lengthy interaction with Ibrahim Pasha, Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire. These talks were facilitated by Alvise (also known as Lodovico) Gritti, the natural son of Doge Andrea Gritti and Ibrahim's friend, who was an influential economic actor in Constantinople, and later became Regent of Hungary (he held the office between 1530–1534).<sup>58</sup> Łaski wrote a diary of his mission that provides us with insight into the dynamics of his exchanges with the two lords, Ibrahim and Gritti. On 26 December, Łaski and Gritti met and discussed John I's situation. Łaski claimed:

[The pashas] will be more complaisant towards my lord if we refer to the money to be transferred from Venice, which is sent monthly to my lord by the most Christian king [Francis I] according to their alliance, namely that he gives thirty thousand crowns every month. Due to the war fought with Ferdinand, there is no safer way to transfer this money to Hungary than towards there [Venice] or Ragusa<sup>59</sup> but that [the former] seems safer to me.<sup>60</sup>

The detailed nature of their conversation suggests a confidential relationship between Łaski and the Gritti whose economic influence in Constantinople contributed to his strategy to build a political career.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> From Rincón to Montmorency on 23 September 1527. Charrière, ed., *Négociations*, 160–161. The manuscript can be found in BnF, Collection Béthune, No. 8537.

<sup>58</sup> See Ferenc Szakály, *Lodovico Gritti in Hungary 1529–1534: A Historical Insight into the Beginnings of Turco-Habsburgian Rivalry* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> The Republic of Ragusa was an aristocratic maritime republic in Dalmatia [today Dubrovnik, Croatia].

<sup>60</sup> Hieronymus Łaski's report about his Constantinople mission in 1527–1528 was published in Matthias Bel, ed., *Asparatus ad Historiam Hungariae, sive collectio Miscella, Momentorum ineditorum partim, partim editorum, sed fugientium* (Pozsony [today Bratislava, Slovakia], 1835), 159–189, 165, “Dominus meus intellexit, hic te agere, & pollere hic apud Bassas gratia: quare rogat, ut sis mihi consilio in ista porta, cuius ego consuetudinem nescio. Tamen, maius erit officium Domino meo, monstrando in transferendis pramiis ex Venetiis, quae singulis mensibus, Christianissimus Rex, Domino meo, vi confaederationis, sub nomine auxilii mittit Venetias, pro quolibet mense scilicet XXX. Millia coronarum dando. Haec pecunia propter bellum cum Ferdinando, per nullam aliam viam tutiorem Ungariam conduci, quam per hanc, aut per Aragusam possunt; tamen, tutior mihi ista videtur. Sed postquam habueris licentiam, publice huc ad mi veniendi, & sciuro, si hic pacem conficiam, tunc de pramiis hisce melius consulamus”. The original manuscript of Łaski's report was in Bel's possession when he compiled his volume, but we do not know what happened to the document afterwards. Gábor Barta published the source and stated in his introduction that he corrected the most obvious mistakes of Bel's text. See Gábor Barta, *Két tárgyalás Sztambulban: Hieronimus Łaski tárgyalása a töröknél János király nevében. Habardanecz János jelentése 1528. nyári sztambuli tárgyalásairól* [Two negotiations in Istanbul: Hieronimus Łaski's negotiation at the Turk on behalf of King John. János Habardanecz's report about his negotiations in the summer of 1528 in Istanbul] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1996). I consulted this edition and interpreted the text accordingly. ‘Crown’ refers to *écu* (*couronne*), the currency of the Kingdom of France at that time.

<sup>61</sup> See Gizella Nemeth Papo and Adriano Papo, eds., *Ludovico Gritti: un principe mercante del Rinascimento tra Venezia, i turchi e la corona d'Ungheria* (Mariano del Friuli: Edizioni della Laguna, 2002).

Two days later, on 28 December, Łaski was interrogated by Ibrahim Pasha to arrange an agreement between John and Suleiman. Ibrahim wished to convince Łaski to “promise a tribute in the name of your king... Otherwise, we will not hand over Hungary either to your lord or to Ferdinand”.<sup>62</sup> As a counter-argument and to emphasise the Christian monarchs’ unity, Łaski took a bold step and suggested the possibility of a war against the sultan, to be led by Francis I, by stating that “he [Francis] will resurrect even the dead against you because an infinite number of people will come with the French king...”.<sup>63</sup> In light of the anti-Habsburg interests shared by Suleiman and Francis, we can regard Łaski’s claim as a rhetorical attempt to strengthen his king’s position in the obviously unequal power relation with the sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

Łaski’s mission to the Porte resulted in a so-called “treaty of friendship and fraternity” between John and Suleiman on 29 February 1528.<sup>64</sup> This agreement proved to be a vassal relationship throughout the king’s reign. The War of the League of Cognac against the House of Habsburg was not about to come to an end. In fact, Hungary’s potential to facilitate the League’s position on the Italian front became evident to the King of France. The Kingdom of Hungary had a geopolitically crucial location in the central part of the continent, between the expanding spheres of Habsburg and Ottoman influence. Francis I realised that by supporting John Szapolyai, he could prolong the kingdom’s internal power feud, divert a significant part of Habsburg financial and military resources, and eventually, destabilise and weaken the easternmost lands of the enemy dynasty. The fragmented Kingdom of Hungary thus became a tool in French great power strategy.

Therefore, Antonio Rincón travelled to Hungary again. He joined Polish soldiers in a battle against Ferdinand I in early 1528. Peter Tomicki, Sigismund I’s strongly anti-Habsburg vice-chancellor, wrote that Rincón “was among the infantry, who fought with great courage”.<sup>65</sup> Arguably, the Castilian played a multifaceted role as a diplomatic and military actor, maintaining ties with multiple courts and individuals.

It was in the late 1520s when the goals of Rincón’s journey in the early 1520s were achieved. On 16 May 1528, John I issued a letter of credence for another envoy, John Statileo, bishop of Alba Iulia (Transylvania), in which the purpose and tasks of a mission to France were outlined. Statileo was fully commissioned to:

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<sup>62</sup> Bel, *Asparatus*, 170, “Obsequere consilio meo, fac Domino meo honorem, nomine Regis tui, promitte tributum, stabit Dominus tuus eo melius, quam alias. Nam aliter, nec Domino tuo, nec Ferdinando, Hungaria cedemus”.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, 171, “Quae res, si sortietur effectum, credo & mortuos, ut ita dicam, contra vos surrecturos; quia cum rege Francia ibunt infiniti, qui cum alio ire etiam nec cogitassent”.

<sup>64</sup> AT 10, no. 88, 97–98, and also nos. 97–98. On Ottoman-Hungarian relations, see Gábor Barta, “A Forgotten Theatre of War 1526–1528 (Historical Events Preceding the Ottoman–Hungarian Alliance of 1528)”, in *Hungarian-Ottoman military and diplomatic relations in the age of Süleyman the Magnificent*, ed. Pál Fodor and Géza Dávid (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University/Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1994), 93–130.

<sup>65</sup> Tomicki to the Castellan of Poznan in ibidem, no. 136, 145–146, 145, “... erat inter pedites, qui satis animose pugnarunt”.

travel between His Majesty [Francis I] and ourselves [John I], and to initiate, make, and strengthen good friendship, brotherhood, understanding, and alliance. We entrust him to arrange all the things in our name, generally and particularly to do, arrange, and exercise that which are necessary and advantageous around the previously mentioned friendship, brotherhood, tie, and alliance.<sup>66</sup>

The letter specifically mentioned a prospective alliance between the two monarchs and projected “a more special mandate” for further negotiations.<sup>67</sup> John I endowed Statileo with full legal power regarding negotiating and concluding a royal coalition in which the interests and ambitions of both crowns could be preserved. On 4 June, we find John Statileo and Antonio Rincón together in Plock, Poland, as indicated in a letter written to Peter Tomicki by the humanist Andreas Krzycki who hosted the two envoys in his own house.<sup>68</sup> A brief note on the provision of accommodation proves the key importance of personal connections, trust, and friendships in the successful performance of cross-continental diplomatic duties. Statileo and Rincón were travelling from Poland to England between late June and early August 1528.

The English adventure of Rincón and Statileo is worth considering against the backdrop of European geopolitics in the period. Jean du Bellay, Francis I's ambassador to London, reported to Montmorency about the arrival of two men at the English court on 8 August.<sup>69</sup> On 11 August, Rincón wrote to Montmorency that they had been detained by Cardinal and Lord Chancellor Thomas Wolsey.<sup>70</sup> The use of the word “detained” suggests that the leader of English diplomacy, who was eagerly following the developments of Franco-Habsburg relations on the continent, had a distrust in the Franco-Hungarian agents and found it important to explore their agenda. He interrogated the envoys about John I's position in Hungary. Through Wolsey, Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547) promised a financial contribution to John's struggles.<sup>71</sup> By the second half of 1528, John I's role as a counterweight to Habsburg supremacy became increasingly crucial due to numerous unfortunate events from the French perspective. For example, in June 1528, Andrea Doria, captain-general of the French royal navy, changed sides and started to serve Emperor Charles V as he had been dissatisfied with

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<sup>66</sup> AN, J 995, No. 27. Letter of credence issued by John I for John Statileo in Tarnów on 16 May 1528, “... proficiscendi ac inter Maiestatem suam et inter nos, bonam amicitiam fraternitatem intelligenciam et confederacionem ineundi faciendi stabiliendique, et se nomine ac vice nostra ad omnia obligandi, generaliter vero omnia et singula faciendi, disponendi et exercendi, que circa premissam amicitiam fraternitatem ligam et confederacionem necessaria opportunaque fuerint”.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem, “Etiam si talia forent, que mandatum exigent magis speciale, quam presentibus est expressum, promittentes in verbo nostro regio ac bona fide nostra mediante omnia et singula, que per dictum oratorem nostrum [fiunt]”.

<sup>68</sup> AT 10, no. 272, 260.

<sup>69</sup> Victor-Louis Bourrilly, ed., *Ambassades en Angleterre de Jean du Bellay: La première ambassade (Septembre 1527 – Février 1529). Correspondance Diplomatique* (Paris: Picard, 1905), no. 135, 371–372.

<sup>70</sup> Charrière, ed., *Négociations*, 161, “Io seria in diligentia in continenti andato, ma monsignor il cardinal me a detenuto.” The manuscript can be found in BnF, Collection Béthune, No. 8574.

<sup>71</sup> Federico Stefani et al., eds. *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, vol. 49 (Venice: Visentini, 1897), col. 442.

the remuneration he received from Francis I.<sup>72</sup> As his Italian expedition was failing, a new anti-Habsburg alliance seemed to be a rational step on the French king's part. Arguably, the arrival of two anti-Habsburg agents in London signified developments to be followed from the English point of view.

The Franco-Hungarian alliance was concluded in Paris in September 1528 by John Statileo and Francis I. It laid down the principle that "friends and enemies of the other should be acknowledged and they should be friends and enemies of both [kings]".<sup>73</sup> John I promised to avoid any peace, pact, or agreement with Ferdinand I and offered military support for French aims in the war between the Habsburgs and the League of Cognac for Italy in the form of light cavalry and infantry. Francis vowed that:

... he will really and in fact give and pay twenty thousand golden scudi to sustain the burden of war and will negotiate as far as he can with his allies and confederates so that they contribute from their parts some sum of money to the already mentioned king of Hungary for the maintenance of his war.<sup>74</sup>

The men involved in Franco-Hungarian diplomatic negotiations were in regular contact and informed each other about the major developments in European political and military affairs. One example is Antonio Rincón's correspondence with Jan Łaski, the brother of Hieronymus Łaski who bore the same name as their uncle, Archbishop Jan Łaski. In his letter written in November 1528 to Rincón, Jan reported about John I's return to Hungary, the military help provided by the sultan as well as the Ottoman plans of marching against Vienna. At the beginning of the letter, he emphasised:

I would have written to your lordship a lot that concern the matters of our lord, the most serene king of Hungary [John I], but I do not have the cypher with me now, with which everything would have been written safely, and now it is barely safe to write anything in a letter.<sup>75</sup>

This note testifies to the regular communication between Antonio Rincón and Jan Łaski as well as a variety of tools and methods they needed to use in order to avoid the attention of Habsburg authorities and exchange information in a safe and efficient manner. In March 1529, Rincón was once again dispatched by Francis I with the

<sup>72</sup> Luigi Villari, "Doria, Andrea", in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. 8, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Hugh Chisholm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 425.

<sup>73</sup> AN, J 995, No. 18, "inter dictos principes erit perpetua fraternitas, unio, confederatio et amicitia eorumque successores et heredes, que sit /adeo stabilis et firma, ut nullo tempore valeat interrumpi".

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, "et interim et ex nunc donabit et numerabit realiter et de facto viginti milia scutorum auri pro sustinendo onere belli et procurabit pro suo posse quod sui alligati et confederati ex eorum partibus contribuant aliquam pecunie summam iamdicto regi Hungarie pro sustentacione sui belli".

<sup>75</sup> AT 10, no. 448, 431–432, "Essent mihi multa scribenda ad tuam Dtionem, quae negotium serenissimi Hungariae regis domini nostri concernerent, sed et cyfras illas mecum nunc non habeo, quibus omnia tuto scribi potuissent, et nunc vix totum est quidquam literis committere".

commission of transporting forty thousand *écus* to John I.<sup>76</sup> The Franco-Hungarian alliance was ratified in Buda in September 1529 in the Castilian's presence.

Nevertheless, Hieronymus Łaski's career did not culminate in his pro-John accomplishments. In the early 1530s, he got involved in a plan of conspiracy for the Hungarian throne with Alvise Gritti who facilitated his talks with Ibrahim Pasha in 1528–1529. After the plot had been discovered, Łaski also switched sides and started to serve Ferdinand. Arguably, the instability of Hungarian domestic politics had an impact on larger-scale great power affairs as it created opportunities for adventurous individuals to practice their agency and gain influence and income. Moreover, since both the political coalitions of dynasties and the allegiances between patrons and envoys were highly unsteady in sixteenth-century Europe, it can be claimed that the behaviour of envoys mirrored patterns of “high politics”.

## CONCLUSION

In his 2021 article on late medieval Franco-Hungarian relations, Attila Györkös asserted that in the early sixteenth century the Kingdom of France proved to be the more proactive party, while the Kingdom of Hungary was not interested in getting involved in the main preoccupations of French politics – the Italian Wars and the rivalry between the Houses of Valois-Angoulême and Habsburg.<sup>77</sup> Györkös also pointed out that the French court was not familiar with the Central European region and its geopolitical circumstances, let alone the different interests and problems of the polities in the area. Because of treating the region rather superficially as a sort of “Jagiellon Central Europe” (hence Rincón's joint mission in Hungary and Poland), French diplomacy was not able to achieve long-term diplomatic success there.<sup>78</sup>

When looking at interstate or interdynastic relations through the prism of the sovereigns' aims and interests with a top-down approach, we see a limited list of negotiations and agreements, and in our case, one tangible achievement – the ratified Franco-Hungarian alliance of 1528–1529. We shall, therefore, move “downwards” and examine foreign ties from the perspective of their actors and architects, who travelled across courts and polities, searched for contacts, conducted talks, observed their interlocutors, and reported about their experiences. In doing so, it is possible to uncover formerly unseen correlations and analyse the personality, performance, and office of diplomats.

Investigating the nature of relationships and the dynamics of interactions between our protagonists and the people with whom they exchanged information in the 1520s has allowed us to enhance our understanding of how Franco-Hungarian diplomacy developed in the period. Antonio Rincón and Hieronymus Łaski carried out multiple missions on behalf of their monarchs with the aim of establishing effective alliances against the increasing power of Habsburgs. As they were trying to connect the rulers of distant lands with one another, they established and nurtured

<sup>76</sup> BnF, Clairambault, 1215, fol. 69.

<sup>77</sup> Györkös, “Francia-magyar diplomáciai kapcsolatok (1499–1529)”, 527.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, 528.



numerous relations and carried a large amount of news and information through a range of political entities and princely centres.

The sources analysed in this article highlighted the less formal and direct interactions of Rincón and Łaski, along with the significance of the emotions they showed and observed and the services they performed and received. These often overlooked nuances improve our knowledge of the ways in which these actors understood local and continental geopolitical changes as well as how they made sense of the actions of the individuals they met and talked with. Thus, the accounts and letters written by and about Rincón and Łaski help us explore how the “diplomat’s craft” was practiced in pre-modern Europe.

Finally, the Franco-Habsburg and Habsburg-Ottoman imperial competitions have traditionally been studied separately – and so have been the people and information associated with the Mediterranean and Central European theatres of war. Their circulation *between* these conflict and diplomatic zones has not been extensively explored. The protagonists of Franco-Hungarian and Hungarian-Ottoman relations visited the major power centres of the continent to obtain tangible support and also to map and strengthen sympathetic sentiments. The close examination of their activities and networks through their correspondence shows a fluid connection between spheres. Our case studies have demonstrated that Antonio Rincón and Hieronymus Łaski exchanged news and information with a number of individuals other than monarchs and shaped their strategies according to these interactions. Due to the distance from their home courts and the frequency of unexpected circumstances, these envoys developed their own mechanisms for dealing with hostile and amicable environments alike. Indeed, with a microhistorical approach, we can shed light on a wide array of actors’ agencies and the role that their encounters and networks played in the developments of “high politics”, particularly the increasing interconnectedness of anti-Habsburg efforts in the 1520s. Therefore, this article challenges traditional divisions between the diplomatic arenas of the Western and the Eastern parts of Europe and offers a fresh framework for the discussion of sixteenth-century foreign relations.

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