

Hungarian candidates ordained in the Roman Curia during the Late Mediaeval Period

On the 19th of March 1496, the inhabitants of Rome could observe a group of foreign clerics in the neighbourhood of the Piazza Navona. Naturally, this proved to be a usual practice, as people of different status from every corner of the European continent arrived continuously to the Urbs Aeterna. Among those, who arrived in the city next to the River Tevere, from time to time we may observe those, who wanted to receive different grades of the holy orders either on their own or in groups. As one of these groups, we may mention this numerous groups of clericals, whose members hurried to the Church San Panthaleone in the Parione district of the city, where the general ordination was performed by Joshua, the bishop of Ascoli. Among the 118 candidates, altogether 53 clericals arrived in Rome from the remote Carpathian Basin. Both the number of Hungarians and their ratio among the whole group (45%) should be highlighted, as such a populous group of clericals cannot be mentioned neither from the previous nor from the following decades. In my presentation, I will survey the general characteristic features of the “*turismo delle ordinazioni*” of Hungarian clericals on the bases of the *Libri formatarum* series, which can be found in the *Camera Apostolica* fond of the *Archivio Segreto Vaticano*. I will seek answers to the following questions: Who and why did undertake the long journey? From which regions and in which ratio of the Carpathian Basin arrived clericals to the Papal Court? Did the Hungarian and international political events influence these journeys?

The sources

The right of curial ordination of clerics solely belonged under the authority of the Apostolic Camera until the 15th century, consequently the whole process of Roman ordination was under the supervision of this central organ’s chamberlain. Parallely with the curial reforms of Pope Martin V., general information regarding the ordinations were documented in the volumes of *Libri formatarum*, an independent register series from the fond of the *Archivio Segreto Vaticano Camera Apostolica* from 1425 to 1524. This series of fourteen volumes provides the topic’s main corpus of sources. From the 16th century onwards, the *vicarius in spiritualibus in Urbe* started to play an increasingly important role in the ordinations taking place in the Eternal

City. Data regarding the promotions, which belonged to the jurisdiction of the Roman vicar, can be found in two further registers, the *Tribunale del Vicariato* 335. (1507–1521), located in the Central Archives of State in Rome, and in the first volume of the *Ordinazioni Sacerdotali* (1501–1524) belonging to the vicariate’s archive. Besides the above-mentioned founts, a few pieces of information can be spotted in the 52nd volume of the *Diversa Cameralia* of the *Vatican Secret Archives*, furthermore two *in partibus* promotional verification remained to us: *littera formata*. In addition to the cited sources the volumes of supplications from the *Dataria Apostolica* and the registers of the *Sacra Poenitentiaria Apostolica* both contain numerous relevant data which are all essential to the complex presentation of the topic.

While the phenomenon of massive curial promotions previously captivated the attention of international researches – several adaptations and sources were issued in this subject matter (eg. by Ludwig Schmugge, Andreas Rehberg, Zdeňka Hledíková, Kirsi Salonen és Jussi Hanska, Vladimír Rábik) especially during the last decade – in the Hungarian historiography this approach has not yet been reflected until very recently.

The number of clericals

According to the sources, from the Carpathian Basin altogether 792 persons turned to the Apostolic Camera and to the offices of the vicariate in promotional cases between 1426 and 1523. Among them 786 availed the services of the Camera while the remaining six persons turned to the Roman Vicariate. Out of the Apostolic Camera’s clients the volumes of the *Libri formatarum* contains the name of 783 people. Since the 50 Hungarian clerics applied for nothing but ordination licenses (*littera dimissoria*), therefore, 742 people took actually part in curial promotions. As the matter of fact, probably more Hungarian clerics were ordained in the Roman Curia, but due to the decay of sources we can only presume this.

1st Chart

Entries of Hungarian relevance in the volumes of *Libri formatarum*

Volume	First entry	Last entry	Person
1.	1426. III. 23.	1435. IV. 16	32
2.	1436. II. 7.	1446. IX. 24.	57
3.	1447. III. 25.	1455. IV. V.	29
4.	1466. III. 22.	1470. III. 26.	14
5.	No Hungarian data		
6.	1471. XII. 21.	1475. IV. 11.	13

Volume	First entry	Last entry	Person
7.	1481. VI. 24.	1482. IV. 21.	3
8.	1486. V. 20.	1488. IV. 13.	28
9.	1488. IV. 5	1490. IV. 7.	111
10.	1490. IV. 4.	1492. IV. 21.	30
11.	1492. XI. 25.	1496. XII. 28.	242
12.	1497. I. 15.	1502. I. 30.	132
13.	1502. III. 22.	1520. XI. 10.	24
14.	1521. III. 9.	1523. III. 31.	68
Σ	1426–1523		783

The majority obtained the three higher grades of church orders, the so called *sacros ordines*. 499 clerics were ordained to sub-deacons, 409 to deacons and 420 became presbyters. This implies that it was worthy to start the journey from the Carpathian Basin in order to acquire a higher grade. Altogether 318 people came for only the first tonsure while 316 arrived to take the *quator minores* up in the *Curia Romana*. Curial ordinations were less of a practice among Hungarian prelates. This statement is also supported by the fact that in the observed period it only happened once.

2nd Chart

The division of church order grades obtained in the Curia

Grade	Person	%
<i>prima tonsura</i>	318	43
<i>acolitatus et quatuor minores</i>	316	42,6
<i>subdiaconatus</i>	499	67
<i>diaconatus</i>	409	55
<i>presbiteratus</i>	420	56,6
<i>episcopatus</i>	5	0,7

Regarding the division of church benefices a very diverse picture unfolds. 220 persons did not possess one, which was self-evident in the case of the inferior orders. The majority (84 percent) of the afore-mentioned clerics without any benefices were promoted (*promovere*) only to the first tonsure or to other smaller orders. However, 35 people obtained the three higher grades without the notary chamber indicating a benefice of any kind next to their names, nor mentioning any other income that could provide a sufficient living. Among them, 29 were ordained to sub-deacons, eight to deacons and six to presbyters. Beside the names of the Hungarian prelates we can find a wide repertoire of benefices. The three most numerous groups consist of altar beneficiaries, parish priests and rectors of parish churches. They are followed by rectors of chapels, monks, but prebendaries, canons, bishops, sacristans and schoolmasters are also to be found.

3rd Chart
The division of the benefices' levels

<i>Type of benefice</i>	<i>Person</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>
None	220	30
Altar	193	26
Chapel	73	9,8
Prebendary	7	0,9
Sacristan	1	0,1
Schoolmaster	1	0,1
<i>cantor</i>	1	0,1
<i>perpetuus beneficiatus</i>	2	0,3
Parish	154	20,7
Rector of the parish	68	9,1
Canon	7	0,9
Monk	10	1,3
Bishop	5	0,7
Σ	742	100

Persons and groups

Clerics whom turned up in the documents of curial promotions could take part in the liturgical services individually or in groups as well. The decisive majority of the Hungarians started off the long, exhausting and often dangerous Italian voyage in smaller or bigger groups. It was considered to be a general phenomenon that the members of the same nations were consecrated together. Based on this, we can assume that people coming from the same or neighbouring dioceses might tried to synchronise their journey, since traveling together meant a greater deal of safety. The promotional supplications which were submitted in-group, suggest a pre-planned journey. The biggest Hungarian curial ordination took place on the 19th of May, 1496, when altogether 53 persons obtained smaller or bigger church orders. Further promotional days are also known when the number of clerics coming from the Carpathian Basin surpassed 30 or 40 people. A possible, but definitely not sufficient explanation of these group ordinations could be that except for 1523, on every occasion general ordination (*ordinationes generales*) was performed, therefore, the dates – since they were on ember days – were known all around Europe. Subsequently, the candidates could prepare their Roman route appropriately. It is also not surprising that the dates between March and April were preferred by the most, since on one hand, Easter constitutes the centre of the church year, thus the travel to Rome resulted in an even bigger fascination among the believers. On the other hand, the spring weather was more favourable.

4th Chart

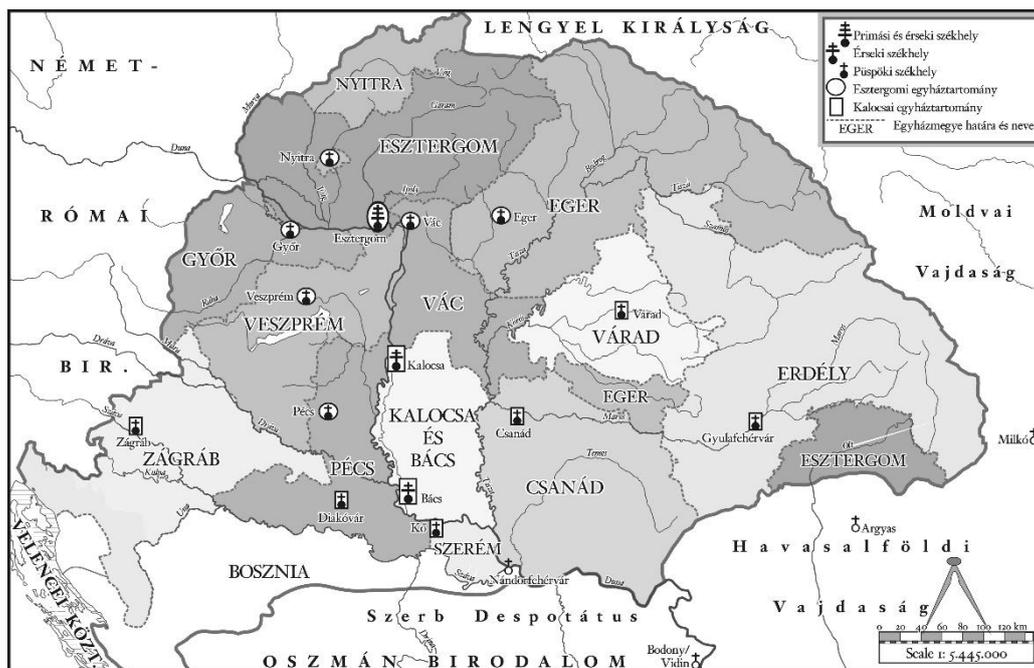
The most frequented promotional days of the Hungarians

Date	Person
1488. IV. 5.	22
1489. IV. 18.	36
1494. III. 15.	23
1495. IV. 18.	42
1496. III. 19.	53
1497. III. 11.	32
1498. III. 31.	46
1523. III. 26.	41
sum	295

Geographical and chronological edifications

Since the ordinands' sees of origin and/or service was indicated in the register books, therefore, it is most opportune to observe the distribution of Hungarian clerics according to their dioceses. In the 15th century, two archbishoprics and 12 bishoprics functioned on the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. Out of the 14 sees, altogether twelve names are present in the promotional documents which were further complemented with the four missionary bishoprics (*episcopatus in partibus infidelium*).

1st Map The Hungarian church organization in the 15th century



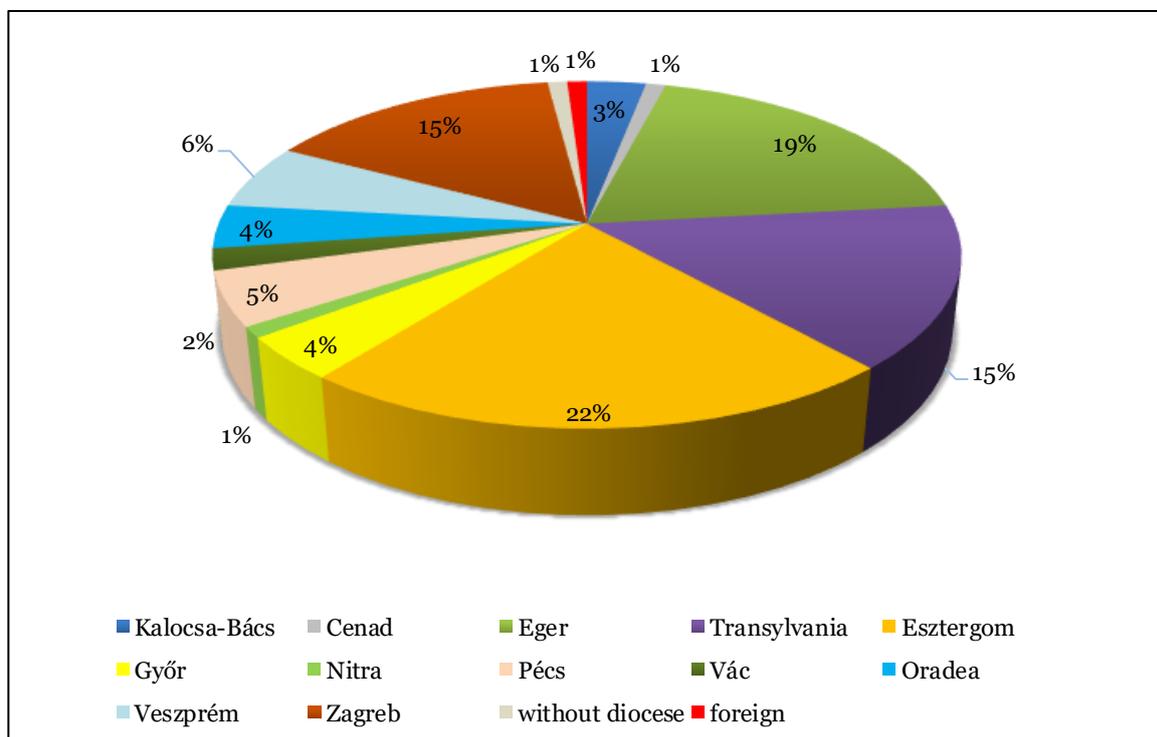
It is conspicuous however, that no ordinands went to the *Curia Romana* from the two southern and at the same time, the poorest dioceses Bosnia and Syrmia. In the

background of this anomaly we can suppose the settlement destruction and the consequent major depopulation caused by the Ottoman incursions which permanently afflicted the region.

Regarding the division among the sees, the dominance of Esztergom (22%), Eger (19%), furthermore Transylvania and Zagreb (15-15%) is inevitable. They are followed by Veszprém (6%) and Pécs (5%). Clerics from Győr and Várada (Oradea) appeared almost in equivalent proportion (4%), a bit lesser number came from the dioceses of Kalocsa-Bács and Vác (3%), while the proportion of Csanád (Cenad) and Nyitra (Nitra) is the smallest (1-1%).

1st Diagram

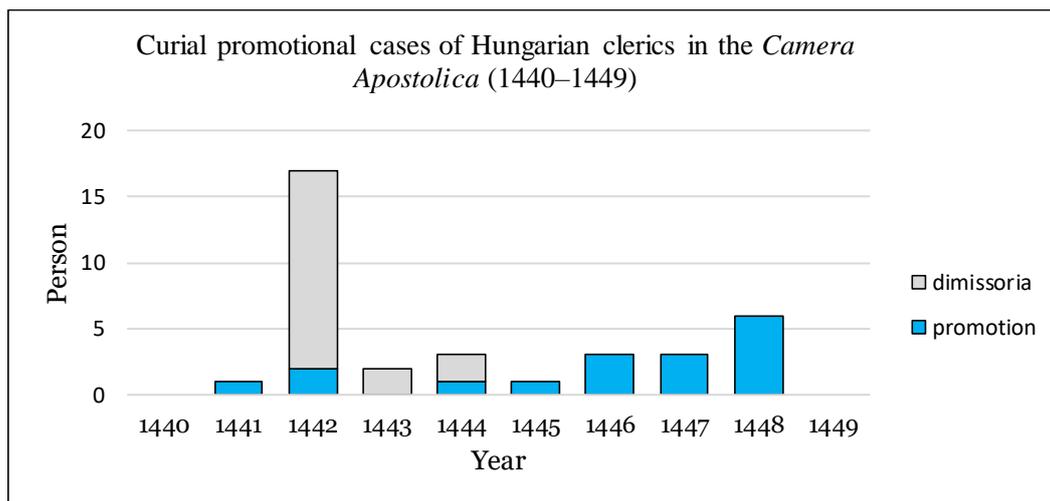
The division of curial promotional cases of Hungarian clerics and possessors per diocese (1426–1523)



What can be drawn as a conclusion based on this? Is it an eventuality or maybe is it rather a tendency that could be fitted into bigger correlations? The previous international and national researches both proved that the Roman representation of clerics from the particular churches is a result of multiple impacts. The demographic and economic circumstances and the consequent social and urban correspondences all played a role in this, as much as the network's density between the papal court and the

given region. It is obvious that other components could be determining as well regarding the regional division of the Hungarian clerics, whom went to be ordained in the Curia. However, the certain diocese's distance from Rome was not among the contributing factors. In the case of Zagreb, we could even explain the 15 percent share, but the ratio of clerics from Transylvania and Esztergom, which collectively came out at 50 percent, points just into the opposite direction. Furthermore, in the case of Esztergom, the Saxon Lands which belonged under the authority of it also complicate the picture. Meanwhile, in spite of the fact that the Transdanubian dioceses, such as Pécs, Veszprém and Győr were much closer to Rome they only represented themselves with 15 percent.

Nevertheless, the major internal and foreign affairs, especially wars and smaller or bigger epidemics could influence the willingness to travel to Italy. As an example, the internal crisis of 1440 (the double coronation, civil war, etc.) and the escalating Ottoman threat did not favour the travels of the Hungarian clerics. In the decade between 1440 and 1449, only 16 Hungarian persons took the different grades of church order up in the centre of Christianity. Besides the internal affairs the rage of plague in Rome between 1448 and 1450 certainly had a deterrent effect.



The struggle for the throne following the death of King Mathias (1490) and the military campaigns on Italy led by the French monarchs, Charles VIII and Louis XII, had a similarly negative impact on the people whom headed to Rome. In the last years of the reign of Mathias Corvinus, we can witness a significant growth in curial promotions. Based on the data it can be pointed out that the growth in number from 1487 onwards reached its peak in the following two years, which meant 50 people (6.7 % growth) in 1488 and 51 people (6.9 % growth) in the next year. In the background of this positive

process, two major things can be supposed: one was the closure of the Austrian military campaign (the occupation of Vienna and Wiener Neustadt) led by King Mathias, and other is the relatively peaceful period on the southern frontier after the Hungarian-Turkish peace treaty in 1483. During the Hungarian “ordination tourism” which was unprecedented both in earlier and later times, in 1495, 77 (10,4%), in 1496, 86 (11.6%), while in 1497, 78 (10.5%) and in 1498, 47 (6.3%) Hungarian possessors’ name can be found in the volumes of *Libri formatarum*. During the span of these four years, the 288 people – whom were ordained in the Curia – constituted nearly 40 percent of the total sum of Hungarian clerics.

But what could be the reason of this outstandingly high rate? In my opinion, this phenomenon could be explained by the fact that Vladislaus II managed to consolidate his power by the middle of 1490, thus creating peaceful circumstances in internal and foreign affairs as well.

By this time, after the burdensome years of war and crisis every inner and external obstacle was out of the Roman journeys’ way, and this condition certainly proved to be a great motivational factor. It is interesting however, that the emergence of Lutheran reformation did not have an impact on the willingness to travel, since in 1523, the promotion of 58 Hungarian clerics took place in the Eternal City. This evidence further strengthens the previous research results of Andreas Rehberg, according to which the role of Rome in the ordinations of priests did not decline in the first half of 1520.

Why Rome?

At last, the motivational factors behind the curial promotions should be examined. In February 1429, 18 Hungarian clerics submitted a supplication to be ordained in the Curia, in which they named pilgrimage as the cause and purpose (*causa devotionis et peregrinationis*) of their journey to Rome. Therefore, it is certainly considered to be an important motive, and meant a higher prestige for clerics to be consecrated close to the relics of Saint Peter and Paul. Thus, it is understandable that for those whom spent a longer time in Rome, curial ordination was a plausible opportunity.

To this group belonged the employees of the Papal Curia, cardinals, members of the bishops’ families, diplomats delegated to the Holy See, members whom belonged to a royal entourage coming to Rome, and students attending the city’s university. Emerick, provost of Bosnia arrived to Sixtus IV as the envoy of King Mathias in August,

1471, and in the following month submitted a supplication in person to the *Dataria*, in which he asked for and was granted license to take up the holy orders. The clerics Philip (1432) from the diocese of Esztergom and the Transylvanian András Kis of Brassó (1441) and János Aranyos (1476) wanted to be ordained in Rome relying on the fact that they had been living in the city for quite a while.

In February 1436, 11 diocesan clerics from Zagreb were granted permissions by the leader of the Apostolic Camera to be consecrated by any catholic prelate if they were found suitable. This could only happen because the episcopal seat of Zagreb was vacant at the time (*in ipsis partibus ad presens sedes episcopalis vacat*). In 1438, altogether 22 Hungarians and two foreign clerics submitted supplications to the office of the Apostolic Penitentiary, in which, similarly to the previous case, asked for a license; they explained this act by arguing that their own ordinary celebrated consecrations very rarely (*raro ordines celebrant*). Therefore, in cases alike the possibility of curial promotion was open to candidates.

Certain problems, defects (*defectus*) and delinquencies (*delictus*) committed against canon law could emerge at the applicants' side, causing an irregular state (*irregularitas*) and ultimately being impediments to ordination. In case of the above-mentioned problems, candidates could gain dispensation primarily from the Curia. Wolfgang Altmon, diocesan of Győr, is an example for the latter. He submitted a supplication personally to the office of the Penitentiary, because of the defect of his right eye – which was considered to be an impediment to consecration – he asked for and was granted a dispensation and finally took the smaller grades of church orders up in the *Santa Maria Regina Coeli* church.

Many people tried to take the different grades of church order up apart of those dates that were determined by canon law (*tribus diebus dominicis vel festivis extra tempora a iure statuta*) and hence travelled to the Curia.

Various incidents of misuse occurred during curial ordinations. A prevalent form of this was to be promoted based on a non-existent, fictive benefice (*adfictum titulum*). Since in order to obtain higher orders, candidates should be in the possession of a church benefice which could provide a sufficient living. However, many of the applicants did not have such a possession, nor any other secured income, and for this reason they perpetrated a fraud. Among the supplications which were proposed to the Penitentiary's office, many cases like this can be found. Among them, there is the

appeal of Osvát Layter, diocesan of Győr, whom in the default of appropriate holdings, had himself consecrated based on a fictive benefice (*sufficientem titulum non haberet*).

As a conclusion, it can be stated that during the late medieval era Hungarians led by many different reasons, but were constantly present in ordinations occurring in the Roman Curia. It is self-evident that their number was significantly less than of their contemporaries coming from German, French, Iberian and Italian regions. Nevertheless, the Hungarian “ordination tourism” certainly embodied an integral part of the relations between Hungary and the Holy See.

TAMÁS FEDELES

University of Pécs
Hungarian Academy of Sciences
(HAS-PPCU Vilmos Fraknói Vatican Historical Research Group)