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WINE TRADE, MEDICINE AND INSOLVENCY  
THE LETTERS OF AGOSTINO BENCI,  
THE PHYSICIAN OF IPPOLITO I D'ESTE (1488–1498)

This paper discusses the letters by Agostino Benci, the court physician of Ippolito I d'Este,<sup>1</sup> Archbishop of Esztergom, sent from Esztergom (Strigonium, Gran), Vienna, Pavia and Ferrara, and preserved in the State Archives of Modena.<sup>2</sup> I transcribed and translated the letters, the Italian sources are placed in the appendix, and parts of the letters are given in translation in the main text. In the following these letters are presented first in terms of form, then in terms of content. The material affords us glimpses into the everyday life of a physician in the service of a prelate with princely origin, which also adds interesting information to our knowledge of the social history of the last years of King Matthias's<sup>3</sup> and the first years of King Vladislaus II's<sup>4</sup> reign.

### The corpus

Altogether ten letters have been preserved by Benci, of which one is practically illegible,<sup>5</sup> so the present study analyses nine letters. Their language is the Italian vernacular but, in line with the norms of the period, the date is always given in Latin, and occasionally a Latin phrase or even a sentence is inserted.<sup>6</sup>

The letters are written on paper, each is a single page long, and the text area is always regular except for the odd marginal correction. There is no reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the sources, the handwriting of the nine letters is completely uniform except for one of the post scripta of the last letter, dated 6 September 1498, written to Tommaso Fusco, secretary of Ippolito. The hand

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<sup>1</sup> Ippolito I d'Este (1479–1520) Archbishop of Esztergom (1486–1497), Bishop of Eger (1497–1520), Cardinal (1493–1520).

<sup>2</sup> The chronologically earliest eight letters are found under ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2. These were digitised by the Vestigia I research project (OTKA no. 81430); they, along with many other letters, are freely accessible via the internet: [www.vestigia.hu](http://www.vestigia.hu). The remaining two letters are found under ASMo ASE C. Misc. Mat. Medici e medicina b. 19; since these have no Hungarian relevance they have not been digitised.

<sup>3</sup> Matthias I Corvinus (1443 – 1490), King of Hungary (1458–1490).

<sup>4</sup> Vladislaus II Jagiellon/ Vladislav II Jagellonský (1456–1516), King of Bohemia (1471–1516), King of Hungary (1490–1516).

<sup>5</sup> ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2/15/8. (Vestigia database no. 2538.) No. 8 in the table below.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Sources: Letter 7: *Quid aliquis... ignoro item*.

shows humanistic features but is less regular, so it cannot be regarded as humanistic cursive; it shows the appearance of an individual handwriting.

In terms of formal features, the letters are wholly in harmony with the norms of the period. They all include *intitulatio*, *narratio* and *recommendatio* in Italian, *datatio* and *infrascriptio* in Latin, and Italian *post scripta* are often found.<sup>7</sup>

The following table summarises the most important information regarding Benci's letters.

no.	Date	Sent from	Sender	Addressee
1.	8 May 1488	Wien	Agostino Benci	Eleanor of Aragon
2.	18 March 1491	Esztergom	Agostino Benci	Eleanor of Aragon
3.	June 1491	Esztergom	Agostino Benci	Eleanor of Aragon
4.	4 May 1492	Esztergom	Agostino Benci	Eleanor of Aragon
5.	8 February 1496	Esztergom	Agostino Benci	Tommaso Fusco
6.	4 March 1496	Esztergom	Agostino Benci	Ippolito I d'Este
7.	16 March 1496	Esztergom	Agostino Benci	Tommaso Fusco
8.	sine data	Esztergom	Agostino Benci	presumably Ippolito <sup>8</sup>
9.	25 April 1498	Pavia	Agostino Benci	Ercole I d'Este of Ferrara
10.	6 September 1498	Ferrara	Agostino Benci	Tommaso Fusco

Thus, if we disregard the letter the date of which is illegible, we have one source from the late 1480s and nine from the years 1491–1498.

As can be seen, Benci sent all his letters but three from Esztergom. Letter 1 is dated from Vienna, letter 9 from Pavia and the last letter is from Ferrara. The person to whom the greatest number of letters was addressed is Duchess Eleanor of Aragon,<sup>9</sup> Ippolito's mother. Benci turned to her in 1488, in two letters of 1491 and again in 1492. He addressed three letters<sup>10</sup> to Tommaso Fusco, Ippolito's secretary.<sup>11</sup> The letter dated 4 March 1496 was addressed to Archbishop Ippolito, the other one dated April 1498 to Duke Ercole I d'Este of Ferrara.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Sources: Letters 1, 5, 9, 10. For the formal features of letters see Lazzarini, „Materiali per una didattica delle scritture pubbliche di cancelleria nell'Italia del Quattrocento,” 17.

<sup>8</sup> It is illegible, but the reverse bears the inscription “Illustrissime.”

<sup>9</sup> Eleanor of Aragon/Naples (1450–1493), Duchess of Ferrara, wife of Ercole I d'Este (1473–1493).

<sup>10</sup> Sources: Letters 5, 7, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Berzeviczy, *Beatrix királyné (1457–1508): Történelmi élet- és korrajz*, 400.

<sup>12</sup> Ercole I d'Este (1431 – 1505), Duke of Ferrara (1471–1505).

The letters contain references to further, thus-far undiscovered letters. The following table summarises these references.

Date	Sent from	Sender	Addressee	Note
End of 1487, more probably before May 1488	sine loco	Ludovico Bruzzi	Agostino Benci	Ref. in letter 1
10 November 1490	Probably Ferrara	Eleanor of Aragon	Agostino Benci	Ref. in letter 1
Between May 1488 and November 1490 if there was a lost letter	Probably Esztergom	Agostino Benci	Eleanor of Aragon	Ref. in letter 2: „which came in reply to my letters”
Between May 1488 and November 1490	Probably Ferrara	Eleanor of Aragon	Beltrame Costabili	Ref. in letter 3 (Vestigia database no 1701? – Benci not mentioned by name)
Between March 1489 and 6 February 1490	Probably Esztergom	Agostino Benci	Eleanor of Aragon	Ref. in letter 2 „when King Matthias arrived”
Between spring and June 1491	Probably Ferrara	Eleanor of Aragon	Beltrame Costabili	Ref. in letter 3. Paulizia’s arrival
Between late 1495 and January 1496	sine loco	Pietro Maria Montelini	Agostino Benci	Ref. in letter 5
1496 if Fusco complied with Benci’s request	sine loco	Forged by Tommaso Fusco in the name of Ippolito I d’Este	Beatrice of Aragon	Ref. in letter 5
Between second half of 1495 and February 1496	sine loco	Ippolito I d’Este	Agostino Benci	Ref. in letter 6 („which letter was written by Your Most Reverend Self to me”)
Between second half of 1495 and February 1496	Wiener Neustadt	Pietro Maria Montelini	Agostino Benci	Ref. in letter 7

## Agostino Benci's family

From a Hungarian perspective, Andrea Benzi (mid-1300s–1437), the archbishop of Spalato (today Split, Croatia) is an interesting figure,<sup>13</sup> who was associated with the Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxembourg<sup>14</sup> himself, even living in his court for some time, and was appointed Archbishop of Kalocsa in 1414.<sup>15</sup>

Without doubt the most prominent member of the family is Agostino's grandfather, Ugo Benzi. Born in Siena, he was a humanistic philosopher and professor of medicine,<sup>16</sup> and his philosophical works include *De logicae artis ratione* (probably 1399), a commentary on Aristotle's *Parva naturalia* and the *Quaestiones*, a work on the philosophy of medicine. His works on practical medicine include the *Consilia*, the *Trattato circa la conservazione de la sanitate*, and the *Consiglio* written for Niccolò d'Este. Of his sons three, viz. Socino (the author of *Vita Ugonis*, a work dedicated to his father's life), Andrea and Francesco also became physicians.

In his monograph on Ugo Benci, Dean P. Lockwood mentions Agostino, the protagonist of the present study, as the son of Ugo's third son Francesco Benzi, but no sources for this information are cited.<sup>17</sup> We do not know when this Francesco was born, but he must have been younger than either Socino or Andrea. There is evidence that he studied medicine at the University of Florence in June 1447, and while we find him teaching at the University of Ferrara for a salary of 25 lire in 1450, he lags considerably behind his brothers who by this time belonged to the professional élite (Andera had a salary of 120 lires, Socino 125 lires).<sup>18</sup> He died on 28 January 1487, the year in the middle of which his son Agostino moved to Hungary.

I assume that the fact that his family was trusted and esteemed by the House of Este played a role in Agostino Benci being sent to Hungary, as did the fact that because of Andrea, former Archbishop of Kalocsa. We might assume, in-

<sup>13</sup> "Benzi, Ugo," 710–12.

<sup>14</sup> Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368 – 1437), King of Hungary and Croatia (jure uxoris) (1387–1437), King of Germany (1410–1437), King of Bohemia (1419 – 1437), and Holy Roman Emperor (1433 – 1437), as well as prince-electors of Brandenburg (1378–1388 and 1411–1415).

<sup>15</sup> See Katona, *A kalocsai érseki egyház története*, 223–27. The author lists the following name variants: Benzi(s) de Gualdo, Brunsei, Brentiis, Bentiis. Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája (1301–1457)*. Claims that *András Benzi de Gualdo* was archbishop of Kalocsa between 1413 and 24 April 1419.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. "Benzi, Ugo.", Lockwood, *Ugo Benzi: Medieval Philosopher and Physician (1376–1439)*.

<sup>17</sup> Lockwood, *Ugo Benzi. Medieval Philosopher and Physician (1376–1439)*, 170.

<sup>18</sup> I consulted the sources concerning his person: ASMo ASE C. Misc. Mat Medici e medicina b. 19. (Benzi Francesco). The documents from the period 1477–1483 all concern Francesco being „borrowed” from the Estes and, the borrowers being very satisfied with his services, they praise him or even want to keep him.

deed, that Benci was interested in Hungary because of the traditions of his family.

### Agostino Benci's life

It is not known when Agostino Benci was born. What we do know is that when he arrived in Hungary he must have been middle-aged, perhaps older, because in a letter dated 25 May 1487, Queen Beatrice<sup>19</sup> asks Eleanor to send with Ippolito a physician who is “highly trained, reliable and well-meaning” and not too young.<sup>20</sup>

The letter dated 4 March 1496 tells us that he arrived to Hungary in 1487,<sup>21</sup> and the last two tell us that he returned to Italy as part of Ippolito's entourage, where he remained in the cardinal's service.<sup>22</sup> The date and place of his death are unknown. The last source to mention him is a letter by Ippolito I d'Este to Ercole I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, dated 27 May 1499.

The letters provide very few glimpses of his life. In the first letter, Benci tells of being sent to Slavonia by Beatrice to cure one of the queen's retainers. From the same letter we learn that his brother-in-law was called Ludovico Bruzzi, and he was compelled to avail himself of his money. As he writes:

I was entitled to a certain sum from the court, and since my brother-in-law Ludovico Bruzzi made purchases for me against this sum, I transferred this benefice to him. He now informs me that he has not received a penny from the court. I therefore ask, nay implore Your Excellency to intercede on my behalf by letters to Niccolò Ariosto that he may deign to give the said sum to my brother-in-law lest I should continue to be pestered by my brother-in-law's letters.<sup>23</sup>

The second letter tells us that Benci did not feel at home in Hungary. His antipathy towards Hungarians is palpable, and he fears his professional knowledge will actually diminish.

<sup>19</sup> Beatrice of Aragon (1457–1508), Queen of Hungary, wife of King Matthias (1476–1490), wife of King Vladislaus II (1490–1500).

<sup>20</sup> “*Quantunque con lo signore don Hippolito venga uno medico cognoscimo [...] uno che sia ben docto, fidato et da bene et non sia multo iovene [...]. Anchora la pregamo lo voglia mandare prestissimo et, se fosse possibile, volando nanzi la venuta de epso signore Don Hippolito [...].*” ASMò ASE C. Est. CPE Ungh. b. 1623/2. Cited in Guerra, *Il carteggio tra Beatrice d'Aragona e gli Estensi* (1476–1508), 119–20.

<sup>21</sup> Sources: Letter 6.

<sup>22</sup> Sources: Letters 9, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Sources: Letter 1.

My soul is dismayed, I have few patients, and all of them Hungarians, who like to be treated differently, and this place makes it impossible for me to immerse myself in the sciences, therefore I will necessarily end up totally ignorant, and if this happened it would certainly not be good for my Lord.<sup>24</sup>

In the third letter, Benci asks Eleanor for two, or three months' leave, so he may return and see to certain unfinished business of his own and of his brothers. We learn from the same letter that he was the caretaker of his brothers. We do not learn, however, what exactly the unfinished business mentioned in the letter was.

In his letter to Tommaso Fusco, dated 8 February 1496, he mentions a meeting with Pietro Maria Montelini planned for the summer.<sup>25</sup>

The same letter shows us that when attempting to further his own personal interests, Benci seemed to be desperate. As he writes:

I also have from Her Royal Highness [Queen Beatrice] a payment of 124 florins for Piero Antonio Calderini which he himself gave me to take care of. Without wishing to cause any further inconvenience to Her Royal Highness, I would like to ask Your Excellency [Tommaso Fusco] to write a letter with appropriate and kind words – as I believe you can – in the name of his most reverend self [Ippolito d'Este] to the said Pietro Antonio, asking him to name me as beneficiary, and to pay me out of his love. [Do this] without saying anything else to his most reverend self, and if it does not appear to Your Excellency that you could do this without his most reverend self-learning of it, I ask you to do as I said and intercede for me by letter; I trust Your Excellency very much, and please be so good as to send the letter to me with the very first messenger, and address it to me.<sup>26</sup>

Whether the request was complied with or not is unknown, but since Benci does not mention it in the later letter, while he is at the same time compelled to write to Ippolito concerning his payment, we may assume that it was not.

The letters dated February 1496 and 16 March 1496 inform us that Benci supplemented his modest physician's income by selling wine, an issue which we will return to later.<sup>27</sup> The letter dated 25 April 1498 tells us that prior to that

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<sup>24</sup> Sources: Letter 2.

<sup>25</sup> More precisely Benci informs Fusco that he received Montelini's letter in which he writes about his horse which has not yet arrived and said to be in Győr. Since Benci has no horse of his own he cannot send his own servant to look at it, but if the horse should eventually arrive in Esztergom he would treat it as if it was his own. See Sources: Letter 5.

<sup>26</sup> Sources: Letter 5.

<sup>27</sup> Sources: Letters 5 and 7.

time he had not stayed with Ippolito continuously, but had been sent for only whenever the archbishop fell ill.<sup>28</sup>

In the letter from Ferrara, dated 6 September 1498, Benci asks Tommaso Fusco to intercede on his behalf in certain matters, and makes numerous references to other courtiers such as Pandolfo di Silvestri.<sup>29</sup> A point of interest concerning this document is that there is attached to it a piece of paper with an unfinished note in a different hand, addressed in all probability to the duke (*“Illustrissimo signore mio”*) as a kind of post scriptum. It discusses a certain flood and the construction of dikes. I have not yet been able to ascertain how the two documents relate to each other, but I find it unlikely that they belonged together originally, and I also doubt that the letter fragment, which looks much more like a draft, was ever dispatched.

In the literature I have come across Agostino Benci’s name four times altogether. One of these is in a paper by Venturi Barbolini<sup>30</sup> which lists Benci as part of Ippolito’s court entourage, the second is Lockwood’s monograph on Ugo Benzi mentioned above, which informs us that Agostino was Francesco Benzi’s son. The third work to mention him by name is Emil Schultheisz’ paper<sup>31</sup> on Italian physicians working in Hungary. He uses the variant *Benzo Ágoston* and gives data concerning his salary without attribution. Finally, Alfonso Morselli mentions Benci twice in his 1957 work as a physician accompanying Ippolito in the capacity of *“medico per famiglia”*.<sup>32</sup> (By contrast, the title of the other physician, Antonio Maria Benintendi-Sbelzarino, was “medico de monsignore”, and his salary was 300 florins.) Morselli affirms that Agostino’s salary was 200 florins per year. The same sum, a large one by the standards of the time, is mentioned in two papers by András Kubinyi as the salary of Ippolito’s physician, though he does not give his name.<sup>33</sup>

Several documents may be found in the Vestigia database, apart from account books, in which Benci is mentioned by name. The earliest is a letter of instruction by Ercole I d’Este to Beltrame Costabili, dated 17 June 1487, which includes the list of new appointees to the archbishop’s court, together with

<sup>28</sup> Sources: Letter 9.

<sup>29</sup> Benci claims to have had breakfast with Pandolino and a certain Matteo on 6 September 1498, see Sources: Letter 10.

<sup>30</sup> Venturi Barbolini, “Testimonianze dei rapporti tra l’Ungheria e lo Stato Estense dalle fonti manoscritte conservate presso la Biblioteca Estense Universitaria e l’Archivio di Stato di Modena,” 56.

<sup>31</sup> Schultheisz and Tardy, “Olasz orvosok Magyarországon a XVI. század végéig.”

<sup>32</sup> Morselli, *Ippolito I d’Este e il suo primo viaggio in Ungheria* (1487), 21., 47.

<sup>33</sup> Kubinyi, “Az egészségügyi foglalkozásúak társadalmi és gazdasági helyzete Budán a 15–16. század fordulóján,” 63., Kubinyi, “A magyar orvos- és gyógyszerésztársadalom a Mohácsot megelőző évtizedekben,” 69.

their salaries.<sup>34</sup> Benci's name is found here in the form *Augustino Benzo*, and he is mentioned as the physician of the archbishop's entourage. His salary is 200 florins, indicating that the data cited by the researchers mentioned above are correct. Another document of interest is a report by Maffeo da Treviglio, probably to Giovanni Galeazzo Maria Sforza,<sup>35</sup> dated 7 May 1490, and preserved in the National Archives of Milan.<sup>36</sup> This document uses the name variant *Benzo*, and claims that the physician is related to a certain deceased Francesco. This is surely a reference to Benci's renowned father, mentioned earlier. Yet another source is a letter written to Eleanor by Costabili, at Beatrice's behest, and dated 18 March 1491, which also mentions the physician as *Augustino Bencio*.<sup>37</sup> In this letter Costabili reports that Benci has already informed Beatrice of his desire to return home, and asks Eleanor for further instructions.

Beltrame Costabili also mentions Benci to Eleanor of Aragon, in a letter dated 22 March 1492.<sup>38</sup> This document also uses the name variant *Augustino Bencio*. Beltrame reports to the duchess that the physician has asked for an expeditious payment, to which Beltrame replied that he did not feel entitled to comply, but is asking the duchess because he believes that Benci deserves it.

Donato Aretino, Ippolito's vicar, reports to Ippolito in a letter from Esztergom, dated 20 November 1494, that *maestro Augustino Benzo* left three days earlier.<sup>39</sup>

Yet another letter preserved in Modena may be of interest to us.<sup>40</sup> In this letter, dated 10 February 1496, Beatrice writes to Ippolito concerning the death of a certain Rhodoan who had lived in "Pispeki".<sup>41</sup> The queen asks the archbishop to hand over all property left behind by the deceased to Benci. The name variant in this case is *maestro Augustino Bencio*. Beatrice emphasises the physician's dedication and loyalty. The letter makes it clear that the property in question includes personal effects, as well as real estate in Pispeki. In his letter to Ippolito from Esztergom, dated the 31 May 1498, Aretino mentions *maestro Augustino*, whose payment is to be effected by the vicar as per the archbishop's

<sup>34</sup> ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b.2/19,1. (Vestigia database no. 2170).

<sup>35</sup> Gian Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1469–1494), Duke of Milan (1476–1494). In reality, his uncle governed the Duchy of Milan from 1481. Ludovico Maria Sforza/Ludovico il Moro (1452–1508), Duke of Milan (1494–1500).

<sup>36</sup> ASMi PE Ungheria 642/5,3. (Vestigia database no. 242).

<sup>37</sup> ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b.2/20/10. (Vestigia database no. 2953).

<sup>38</sup> ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b.2/21/1/10. (Vestigia database no. 3018).

<sup>39</sup> ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b.3/11,8. (Vestigia database no. 1334). I am grateful to György Domokos who pointed out to me the references to Agostino Benci in documents concerning Donato Aretino. Domokos and Schrödl-Libárdi, "Donato Aretino magyarországi levelei a Modenai Állami Levéltárban."

<sup>40</sup> ASMo ASE C. Est. CPE Ungh. b.1623/2. 6,2. (Vestigia database no. 2124). Published in Guerra, *Il carteggio tra Beatrice d'Aragona e gli Estensi (1476–1508)*, 201.

<sup>41</sup> unidentified village

instructions sent from Venice.<sup>42</sup>

The last source concerning Benci that is known to me is the letter (mentioned earlier) by Ippolito d'Este, sent from Milan to his father, Ercole I d'Este, and dated 27 May 1499, in which he recommends Benci – soon to arrive – to his father's goodwill. In his own words: "be so good as to receive him as a beneficiary out of love for me, and show goodwill to him in all his business as if it were my own business."<sup>43</sup> We see Benci's name furthermore in a published collection of sources in the form *Augustino Benzo*. This is the collection of documents published by Vilmos Fraknói, which includes the catalogue of Ippolito's books compiled on 6 October 1490, and witnessed by, among others, Benci.<sup>44</sup>

As has been seen, there is uncertainty not only about the details of Benci's life, but also about the very form of his name. He signs the first letter as *Augusti Bencius*, the second probably as *Augustinus Bencius*,<sup>45</sup> the third as *Augos Bencius*, the fourth as *Augusti Bemcius*, the fifth as *Augusti Bencius*, the sixth as *Augusti Bencius*, the seventh again as *Augusti Bemcius*, the ninth as *Augustinus Bemcius*, and the tenth as *Augusti Bencius*. I use the form Benci because given his own – Latinised – signatures, this is most likely to be historically and linguistically correct.

The letters mention several persons associated with the archbishop's court. Not surprisingly, there are many references to his patron Ippolito I d'Este, Archbishop of Esztergom and the queen's nephew. There is only one letter – apart from the one addressed to him – in which his name is not found at all, dated 16 March 1496. There are short references to King Matthias in the first ("the most reverend archbishop is well, and often consorts with the royal couple, whom he likes very much") and the second letter ("I am talking about my payment, which was the reason I asked Your Excellency to dismiss me upon the arrival of His Majesty King Matthias"). Beatrice is mentioned in the first, the second, the fifth and the sixth letters, of which the last highlights the antagonism between the physician and the queen. In his own words: "In these recent days I have asked Her Majesty the queen for my payment as per the letter written to me by your most reverend self upon the matter of my salary, but not only did she not wish to comply, her demeanour was nearly menacing."<sup>46</sup>

In his first letter Benci mentions his brother-in-law Ludovico Bruzzi and Niccolò Ariosto, the father of the humanistic poet Ludovico Ariosto.<sup>47</sup> The

<sup>42</sup> ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b.3/20,2. (Vestigia database no. 1430).

<sup>43</sup> Sources: Letter 11.

<sup>44</sup> Fraknói, "Két hét olaszországi könyv- és levéltárakban 1878. májusban," 145.

<sup>45</sup> The paper is slightly damaged where the signature is.

<sup>46</sup> Sources: Letter 6.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. Bertoni Argentini, "ARIOSTO, Niccolò."

archbishop's vicar Beltrame Costabili is referred to in the second and the third letters with ill-concealed hostility. In the second and the third letters, that is, in March and June 1491, mentioned a certain Paulizia or Paulicio the messenger. In the *post scriptum* to the letter dated 25 June 1491 we read about Francesco da Bagnacavallo, Ippolito's treasurer and chamberlain.<sup>48</sup> In the fourth letter (1492) Benci writes about a certain apothecary who wishes to go home, but we never learn his name. In both of his letters to Ippolito's secretary Tommaso Fusco (8 February and 16 March 1496) he mentions Pietro Maria Montelini, who – as attested also by the Vestigia database – corresponded regularly with Fusco.<sup>49</sup> In his letter dated February 1496 he writes about Piero Antonio Calderini, servant to the Provost of Pécs. In the same letter he mentions a certain Don Zoane, who is perhaps Giovanni da Bagnacavallo, *cappellano* (i.e. chaplain).<sup>50</sup> In his letter to Ippolito he complains of the Bishop of Eger, who by this time was *de facto* Tamás Bakóc.<sup>51</sup> “The Bishop of Eger says that all the tithes of the episcopate have been promised to him, and this is the way he wants it to be. I do not know who to complain to, whether to your most reverend self or Your Grace's officials, because I feel that I have been deceived by one or both.”<sup>52</sup> In the seventh letter, the cellar master of the Provost of Esztergom-Szentistván, András Gosztonyi, makes his appearance.

Concerning the most prominent politicians of the period, very little in the way of new information comes from Benci. From his 1488 letter we learn about Beatrice's three-day fever: she had seven chills during her illness, but by good fortune she recovered. Benci believes that the malaise occurred as a remnant of some disease she had contracted earlier. Benci also confirms the royal couple's friendship towards Ippolito. The only references to Beatrice in the remaining letters concern her refusal to pay his salary. The second letter informs us that Costabili was instructed by Eleanor to try to make Beatrice raise Benci's salary. The following few lines are typical of the language and style of the letters, and may be conveyed even in translation:

[...] from which I was informed that Your Majesty instructed the governor not only to pay me my due, but to persuade Her Majesty to increase my salary to the extent possible at present, for which I am most grateful to Your Excellency, because I see that you not only remember one of the smallest of your servants, but even desire his convenience and wellbeing. But what is the use of writing to someone who cannot

<sup>48</sup> Berzeviczy, *Beatrix királyné (1457–1508): Történelmi élet- és korrajz*, 399.

<sup>49</sup> Sources: Letters 5 and 7.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Vestigia database no. 386.

<sup>51</sup> For the list of the bishops of Eger see Kristóf et al., *A Millenium in Eger*.

<sup>52</sup> Sources: Letter 6.

do anything or so pretends? His Lordship, as far as I can see and judge, can do very little or nothing, and even if he could he would not, because when he could he did not want to, but kept feeding me to satisfaction with words and vain hope.<sup>53</sup>

The letter to Ippolito makes it clear that Beatrice, like Tamás Bakóc, doubted Benci's entitlement to the tithes in question. It goes without saying that Benci writes quite extensively about Ippolito d'Este. The first letter informs us that he enjoys the goodwill of the royal couple and is in good health. In 1492 Benci writes about his patron as follows:<sup>54</sup>

I shall write about Your Excellency's most noble and most reverend son, My Lord, who is, thank God, healthy and has grown so much that at present he seems to me to be my real master and lord, though earlier he did not so seem. At easter time this year His Most Reverend Lordship dressed himself in his cardinal's robe, in which he looked like a real man.

In the same letter he asks Duchess Eleanor to make efforts in Italy to the effect that Ippolito should receive the cardinal's hat as soon as possible. In the ninth letter he reports to Duke Ercole that Ippolito contracted fever at the easter of 1498. He was sent for, and he promptly transferred the scantily clad archbishop to a nearby village where he successfully dampened the fever and the discharge, and the chills ceased as well: "and his most reverend self being clad in very few clothes this was the reason of his fever, which was to cause his third chill today, but it has now ceased."<sup>55</sup>

Apart from the first letter, no mention is made of King Matthias except for the second letter, in which Benci writes that upon one of the king's arrivals he asked to be dismissed. Based on King Matthias' itinerary, it is likely that this arrival took place within the period between March 1489 and 6 February 1490, this being the only period of some length (apart from a shorter stay in Győr [Iaurinum, Giavarino, Raab]) when the king and Benci were both present in Hungary.<sup>56</sup> King Vladislaus II<sup>57</sup> is not mentioned by name in any of the letters; the only relevant reference is in the seventh letter, from which we learn that Benci probably sent eight pints of Fusco's wine to him among others.

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<sup>53</sup> Sources: Letter 2.

<sup>54</sup> Sources: Letter 4.

<sup>55</sup> Sources: Letter 9.

<sup>56</sup> Horváth, *Itineraria Regis Matthiae Corvini et Reginae Beatricis de Aragonia (1458–[1476]–1490)*, 129.

<sup>57</sup> Vladislaus II Jagiellon/ Vladislav II Jagellonský (1456–1516), King of Bohemia (1471–1516), King of Hungary (1490–1516).

Benci's letters provide glimpses into the everyday life of the archbishop's court and the prevailing power dynamics, as well as Benci's own social life. As mentioned earlier, his mistrust of Beltrame Costabili is palpable, as is his conflict of interest with Tamás Bakóc, the Bishop of Eger. It can be surmised that he was on good terms with Tommaso Fusco.

Further points of historical interest include his report on the extremely cold winter of 1495–1496 in the letter dated February 1496,<sup>58</sup> and the obscure post scriptum to his letter of September 1498 concerning a flood, the date and location of which are unknown.<sup>59</sup>

### The contents of the letters

In terms of content, the letters show three major recurring topics. One is medicine, which is surprisingly underrepresented – apart from the ninth letter, which is entirely dedicated to it. The other is the selling of wine, which was mentioned above, as a way of supplementing the physician's income; the third focal point is without doubt Benci's financial situation, and the irregularity of his payments.

#### *Medicine*

Altogether there are three brief references to the state of medicine in contemporary Hungary. The first letter informs us, as was said above, that Benci could be sent as far as Slavonia to treat one of Beatrice's familiars, and that he was also responsible for Beatrice's health, even though officially he was the physician only of the Esztergom court. The second letter reveals that Benci was very dissatisfied with the situation in Hungary. He complained of his few Hungarian patients who preferred different methods of treatment, and he thought that the environment in Hungary was not conducive to advancing his professional knowledge. He found the situation so dire that he feared for the loss of his professional skills. Together with his letter of 1492, he sent the Duchess a list of medical instruments he needed, compiled with the apothecary. The list, however, is no longer extant. In the remainder of the letter he informed Eleanor that the apothecary was about to leave and asked her to send a competent man to replace him. In 1498 he informed Duke Ercole of Ippolito's illness and recovery (again mentioned above), but gave no details of the methods of treatment or actual medication.

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<sup>58</sup> Sources: Letter 5.

<sup>59</sup> Sources: Letter 10.

*Wine trade*

As noted earlier, Benci not only worked as a physician, but was also involved in selling wine in Hungary. We presume that Benci might have received part of his salary in kind (wine) and arranged to sell it. This is also how the matter of tithes is linked to his person, as he obviously received a share of the tithes. In February 1496 he wrote to Tommaso Fusco that he had not yet sold his wine, but was intent on selling it wholesale to the queen's court for cash. The seventh letter, dated 16 March 1496, gives more details: it reveals that he sold 100 pints of Fusco's wine for 1 florin 90 denars. He expected 14 florins and 59 denars from selling 96 gallons of wine at this price, with eight pints to the gallon. A few lines later he gives 16 denars as the price of eight pints, which would give a slightly higher sum of 15 florins and 36 denars. The amount of wine at measurement was checked against eight pints of water, which he had had measured by the cellar master of the Provost of Szentistván, but one of the caskets contained surprisingly little wine: Benci estimated that at least 110 gallons were missing. In the physician's own words:

I have sold Your Grace's [i.e. Fusco's] wine in the following way: I sold 100 pints for one florin and ninety denars. There were 96 gallons, with eight pints to the gallon, and as my servant said there were three that were not clear at all, and he was always present at the selling. Before we started the filling, I measured eight pints of water with a wooden cup for the cellar master of the Provost of Szentistván and marked it, and it was sold against that measure. I am only surprised that one of the caskets contained so little wine that I estimate that 110 gallons of white wine have been lost – I do not know how. I will convert the loss to gold and if you want I will take it even at peril to me, which I will do at my own cost at a price of 16 denars to 8 pints.<sup>60</sup>

*Insolvency*

The most central topic of the letters is without doubt money, or more precisely the lack of it. In the first letter Benci writes to the Duchess about a certain sum owed to him but not yet received – the situation compelling him to use his brother-in-law Ludovico Bruzzi's money – but even he is unable to procure any more money, therefore he asks Eleanor to intercede on his behalf.

From the second letter we learn that although Eleanor had instructed Costabili in writing to pay Benci and to effect for him a pay rise from Beatrice, the physician does not find this solution satisfactory because apparently, he does not trust the governor. In this letter, Benci is very insistent that either he be

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<sup>60</sup> Sources: Letter 7.

paid or relieved of his duties, and complains to the Duchess that not being paid constitutes breach of contract. He claims to have received no more than 255 florins since the first day of his service (his annual salary was supposed to be 200 florins), but some of it he had spent and some of it had been stolen from him, so he is now totally insolvent and was even compelled to sell his personal effects at the end of the summer; he therefore informs Duchess Eleanor that if she does not pay him he will be compelled to flee Hungary, and that if she considers this a reprehensible act she may punish him in Ferrara. In the third letter he insists on receiving the large part of a tithe that had been promised to him, and again expresses his mistrust of Costabili. In the fifth letter, as discussed above, he tries to enlist Tommaso Fusco's help in obtaining his payment in secret, and in the post scriptum of this letter he makes a reference to a certain 2 florins and 1 denar that are owed to him, but the details here are obscure. In his letter to Ippolito, dated 4 March 1496, he is very vocal in his irritation, as he feels cheated. Benci believes that the queen is not entitled to these tithes and asks the archbishop to have the Bishop of Eger sign a promissory note for him or settle the matter in some other way because "if your most reverend self grants my request you will act in a way worthy of a ruler and of every good man and lord". In the last letter there is no reference to Benci not having received his payment.

The first question that comes to my mind concerns Benci's veracity. No doubt there may have been problems with the regularity of payment to the employees of the archbishop's court, but was the situation really as dire as the letters suggest? Was Benci indeed a learned man who made sacrifices and suffered insolvency, or indeed severe deprivation, or was he a courtier focused on his own advancement and on accumulating wealth at all costs? I surmise that the truth is somewhere in between. In 1492 Costabili himself makes a reference to Benci not receiving his payment; at the same time, his request to Fusco to forge a letter in Ippolito's name shows that it was not below the physician to employ devious means in order to achieve his goals. I further suspect that his claim that he had to sell all his property in the summer of 1495 to survive is a gross exaggeration, and letters from the court show that he was held in high esteem. Hajnalka Kuffart has found that Ippolito's account books justify Benci's complaints, since employees often went unpaid at the archbishop's court.<sup>61</sup> The physician's yearly salary was set at 200 florins, but in the year 1487, for instance, he received only 36, which is a disproportionately low sum even if it was not for a full year.

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<sup>61</sup> Kuffart, "Bevezetés Estei Hippolit számadáskönyveihez," Kuffart, "I libri contabili di Ippolito I d'Este, cardinale di Esztergom: Materiali per l'edizione critica."

The other question that emerges from the issue of payments concerns the day-to-day working of the archbishop's court at the time; in particular, who was personally responsible for paying Benci. There are several possible answers. Naturally it could have been the Archbishop of Esztergom, Ippolito himself. On the other hand, Ercole's written instructions and the letters to Eleanor suggest that the Este court of Ferrara was at least partly responsible for covering the expenses of Ippolito and his court. But the Hungarian royal couple may also have played some role, since the sources indicate that Beatrice took a personal interest in Benci's problem.

Erik Fügedi claims that in spite of its vast revenues, the archbishopric never fully paid its employees, who thus became its *de facto* creditors.<sup>62</sup> Debts were often settled by the rearrangement of benefices, and in Benci's case this was probably the background to the conflict with Bakóc concerning the tithes; furthermore, the complaint about Beatrice ("Her Royal Highness is not entitled to the said tithes"<sup>63</sup>) seems well founded since, as Fügedi also asserts, the queen had the habit of appropriating the archbishopric's income for her personal use quite freely.

### Benci's social position and the history of medicine in the period

One aspect of Benci's letters that I find astonishing is that even though they were written in a politically turbulent and eventful period, they contain practically no reference whatsoever to current events. I think there may be two reasons for this: one is that Benci made a point of consciously distancing himself from politics and not making statements that could be used against him later, since whoever the next ruler would be and whatever fate awaited Beatrice, John Corvinus,<sup>64</sup> Vladislaus II, or Ippolito, the archbishopric of Esztergom would continue to exist and doctors would still be needed in the Kingdom of Hungary, so from the point of view of his own career, it made sense to concentrate on his own personal affairs. The other possible explanation is that the physicians of the period simply did not have the social standing that would have warranted dabbling in matters of politics.

In his book *Les Intellectuels au Moyen Âge* Jacques Le Goff discusses in detail the social standing of intellectuals.<sup>65</sup> He claims that in the Middle Ages, the form of a person's income determined their status. If they received a salary, they were 'labourers', while if they had a benefice, they belonged to the high-

62 Fügedi, "Az esztergomi érsekség gazdálkodása a XV. század végén," 172–84.

63 Sources: Letter 6.

64 John Corvinus/Korvin János (1473–1504) illegitimate son of King Matthias.

65 Le Goff, *Les Intellectuels au Moyen Âge*, 135–36.

er ranks. On this basis, Benci was half way between the two, since although his salary was 200 florins per year, he claimed to be entitled to certain tithes, which means he had some benefice at his disposal.<sup>66</sup> But this situation changed during the Renaissance period; Le Goff says that in the late 14th and early 15th centuries there emerged a “caste of intellectuals”, and that from this time on university graduates adopted completely the lifestyle of the nobility.<sup>67</sup> In this sense Benci must have belonged to this ‘caste’.

Sándor Székely in his book on the history of medicine points out that Hungarian kings often entrusted diplomatic affairs to their usually foreign-born physicians.<sup>68</sup> But even though Benci was associated with the court in a variety of ways he was neither the king’s nor the queen’s physician.

In her book on the medical and astrological aspects of Galeotto Marzio’s works, Enikő Békés dedicates a short chapter to the social standing of physicians in the 15th century.<sup>69</sup> She claims that lawyers and physicians competed throughout the Middle Ages, both professions aspiring to primacy within the fields of intellectual life. This claim is partly corroborated, partly supplemented by Grmek, who adds that the primacy of medicine was guaranteed in the Middle Ages by its close association with several other intellectual pursuits, among them logic, astrology, alchemy and philosophy, its links to natural philosophy being especially strong.<sup>70</sup> (This link can be observed very clearly in Ugo Benzi’s life and works.) In this period, the prestige of medicine was in the ascendant, and Benci certainly belonged to an esteemed and acknowledged generation of physicians.

The ambiguous status of physicians is mentioned by Kubinyi too, when he discusses how physicians in medieval Buda bore the title *egregius*, indicating the rank of middle nobility while at the same time serving on the city council, enjoying the privileges of a burgher, and often dabbling in commerce as a source of a sizable income on the side, as Agostino Benci, employed by a high-ranking aristocrat, also did.<sup>71</sup> In his other study, cited earlier, Kubinyi asserts that within the archbishop’s court, Benci’s salary was the third highest, next only to the governor’s and the underage archbishop’s tutor.<sup>72</sup> This is contradicted by Al-

<sup>66</sup> His original, contractually fixed wage was 200 florins (ASMo ASE CeS busta 386. 85. 2037. IV/2. all. b.). He certainly received this amount in 1490 and 1493. Cfr. Kuffart, “Bevezetés Estei Hippolit számadáskönyveihez.” 122–123.

<sup>67</sup> Le Goff, *Les Intellectuels au Moyen Âge*, 135–36.

<sup>68</sup> Székely, *Az orvostudomány története*, 71–93.

<sup>69</sup> Békés, *Asztrológia, orvoslás és fiziognómia Galeotto Marzio műveiben*, 44–47.

<sup>70</sup> Grmek, *Storia del pensiero medico occidentale I: Antichità e Medioevo*, 309–15.

<sup>71</sup> Kubinyi, “Az egészségügyi foglalkozásuk társadalmi és gazdasági helyzete Budán a 15–16. század fordulóján,” 67–68.

<sup>72</sup> Kubinyi, “A magyar orvos- és gyógyszerésztársadalom a Mohácsot megelőző évtizedekben,” 79.

fonso Morelli, who claims that Antonio Sbelzarino [see above] was entitled to three hundred florins per year as opposed to Benci's two hundred.<sup>73</sup> (For comparison, an infantry soldier of the period earned two florins a month, a mounted soldier three.)<sup>74</sup> Thus the literature as well as the sources suggest that Benci was partly of a high rank, partly in a dependent position, but without doubt he had reason to aspire to the lifestyle of a nobleman.

In sum, Benci's letters are sources that provide interesting glimpses into the life of an Italian physician working in Hungary in the service of a prelate, as well as of the day-to-day operations of the Archbishop of Esztergom's court. We find references to the tension between Hungarians and "foreigners" in the late Matthias-era, and we are also admitted to the physician's view of Ippolito.

## Sources

### *1. Agostino Benci to Eleanor of Aragon*

8 May 1488

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2. f. 1.

Vestigia database no. 2519

Agostino Benci informs the Duchess of Ferrara about Queen Beatrice's health, about Ippolito, and about his economic problems.

Illustrissima et Excellentissima Duchessa, essendo lo Reverendissimo Monsignor, Vostro fiolo, ali zorni passati in via per andare a Vienna, venne uno messo di Serenissima Rezina, el quale mi menò in Schiavonia per medicare uno servitore de Quella. Dapoi tornato ala octava di Pasqua, trovai Sua Maestà esser tornata quasi ale pristine sue forze. Da poi ala fine del mese passato a Sua Maestà sopravvenne una terziana semplice, et hanne hauto septe parosismi, de li quali lo septimo è stato tanto leziero che extimo non ne harrà più, et credo che dicta febbre sii più presto stata per qualche reliquia rimasta del mal passato che per altra caxone.

Lo Reverendissimo Monsignore sta bene per Dio grazia, et spesso sta cum le Serenissime Maestà da le quale molto e molto Sua Signoria è acarezata.

Io dovevo haveve alcuni dinari dal comune, e perché mio cugnato, Ludovico Bruzzi, ne haveva spexo alcuni per mi, ge havevo comsignato quilli. Al presente sum avisato da lui come non ne può retrare uno soldo. Per tanto prego e suplico

<sup>73</sup> Morselli, *Ippolito I d'Este e il suo primo viaggio in Ungheria (1487)*, 47.

<sup>74</sup> Kubinyi, "A magyar orvos- és gyógyszerész-társadalom a Mohácsot megelőző évtizedekben," 71.

vostra domina Signoria che Quella faci comissione di bono inchiostro a Nicolò Ariosto, che voglia dare dicti dinari al mio cugnato, aciò che da lui non sii molistato cum lettere. Altro non accade se non che me raccomando ali piedi di vostra Signoria la quale Dio felicitì in le sue voglie. Vienne, ottava madii 1488.

Eiusdem [ducalis Dominationis] post scripta la Maestà di madama è guarita.

Servitor minimus, Augustus Bencius

## 2. Agostino Benci to Eleanor of Aragon

18 March 1491 Esztergom

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2. f. 2.

Vestigia database no. 2526

Agostino Benci asks that Eleanor of Aragon pay his wage arrears and reports on Ippolito.

Illustrissima et Excellentissima Madama, sono za più zorni che io recevi una di Vostra Excellentia di dieci novembre ad alcune mie responsiva per la quale ho inteso Vostra Excellentia haver scritto a Monsignore Governatore che non solo mi havesse a satisfare del mio, ma che anchora fusse cum la Maestà di Madama per aumentarmi la provisione secondo la possibilità del presente tempo di che ne rendo infinite grazie ad Vostra Excellentia perché vedo Quella non solo ricordarsi di uno suo minimo servitore, ma desiderare ogni suo commodo et utile. Ma che ad scrivere ad uno lo quale non possa o simuli non potere. Sua Signoria, per quello che judico et vedo pò pochissimo o niente e se potesse forse non faria perché quando potè non volse ma di continuo mi tenne pasuto di parole et vana speranza. Dico de lo satisfarmi che fu casone che anche essendo venuto la Maestà del re Mathia domandavo licencia di Vostra Excellentia. Vostra Excellentia sa che per una mia domandavo o aumento ovvero licencia. Per un'altra sola licencia cussì fo per la presente perché di aumento non mi curo, né lo voglio, e quello che sozonze Vostra Excellentia che doveria star li volontiera per sapere li modi et complexione del Reverendissimo Patrone mio dico che se extimassi Vostra Excellentia non poter havere uno medico più docto e soficiente di me et poterlo mandare, non solo serviria cum la incomodità et insatisfacione che io ho facto et fo, ma com molto mazore non ne sparagnando alcuna. Ma perché so Quella poterne havere et facilmente mandare et uno bono medico presto comprende la natura et complexione di uno. però Vostra Excellentia per questo rispetto me doveria retenire, anzi, peraltro rivocarmi, e ciò si è che havendo io poco contento di animo, pochissimi infermi da medicare

se non ungarli quali ala contraria se medicano, incomodità di luocho per studiare che serà forza al ultimo in tutto divengi ignorante a che venendo non seria lo utile del Patrone Mio. Però suplico ali piedi di Vostra Excellentia che Quella per sua insita humanità voia darmi bona e grata licencia, la quale in vero non doveria domandare, ma reputando di haverla pigliarmela, perché quando uno signore non solo non paga lo servitore, ma non li dà lo vivere, tale per deserezione doveria intendere essere licenziato, cussi acadendo a mi, lo simile doveria fare, ma non ho voluto, anzi ho ellecto di fare come bono servitore et per questa tertia ovvero quarta mia suplicare Vostra Excellentia che per la ritornata di Pauliza, ovvero di altri voglia scrivendomi licenziarmi, o almeno operare per tale modo che di bona parte del mio salario io sii satisfacto, dello quale dal primo zorno che cominzai a servire per infino al presente ho ricevuto ducati docento cinquanta cinque, deli quali tra spexi et rubati uno solo non me ne rimasto. Se Vostra Excellentia adoncha non fa questo, havendo za facto lo debito mio. mi serà forza per non fare un'altra vernata simile a questa in Ungaria. verso la fine de la state vendere quello poco mi ritrovo. et per quello miore modo che io potrò. Fuzirme et venire a Ferrara acciò che se io harrò errato Vostra Excellentia possa punirmi, la quale Dio conservi in felice stato.

Lo Illustre et Reverendissimo Patrone Mio è sano per Dio grazie grasso et fresco, ma credo che molto meglio staria se appresso di Vostra Excellentia fusse. Nove non scrivo a Quella perché credo che Lei intenderà assai per lo Governatore.

Ali piedi de la quale infinite volte me raccomando.

Eiusdem ducalis Dominationis

Servitor minimus

Augustin Bencius

### *3. Agostino Benci to Eleonor of Aragon*

25 June 1491 Esztergom

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2. f. 3.

Vestigia database no. 2527

Agostino Benci seeks payment of his wages and two or three months' leave to deal with family concerns.

Illustrissima et Excellentissima Ducissa Domina mi singularissima. Per la venuta di Pauliza lo signor Governatore m'ha mostrato una parte di una lettera di Vostra Excellentia sopra lo facto mio, a che risposi assai cosse, tra le quale

due ne dirò ad Vostra Excellentia. L'una che volevo assignacione di bona parte di quello che io ho havere sopra le decime afictate come mi promise; dubito non mi fazzi come per lo passato ha facto che se lo farrà el mi bixognerà fare quello per Pauliza scripsi ad Vostra Excellentia. L'altra parte fu che havendo voglia Vostra Excellentia che io secua lo Patron Mio, bexogna che Quella me dii licencia per mesi dui o tri che a la Quadragesima avenire possi venire a casa essendome necessarissimo per mettere in asseto le cosse mie et di mei fratelli de li quali io sono tutore, le quale cosse, come pò credere Vostra Excellentia, lassai in fasso grandissimo. Non vogliando adoncha Vostra Excellentia fare questo, è del bisogno che Vostra Excellentia mandi uno medico e lassi mi, perché per uno tempo me bixogna essere in casa. Aricomandomi ad Vostra Excellentia per infinite volte la quale Dio conservi Strigoni XXV iunii 1491.

Eiusdem ducalis servitor minime Augustus Bencius physicus

Descrivere a mi et ala Reverendissima per il fatto di Francesco Da Bagno

#### *4. Agostino Benci to Eleanor of Aragon*

5 May 1492 Esztergom

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2. f. 4.

Vestigia database no. 2528

Agostino Benci reports on Ippolito and requests more medical gear (he sends a list of the necessary equipment).

Illustrissima et Excellentissima Ducissa Domina mi singularissima. Non havendo nove alcune da scrivere ad Vostra Excellentia scriverò ad Quella de lo Illustrissimo et Reverendissimo figliuolo Suo Patron Mio, lo quale per Dio grazia è sano, et tanto facto grande che a lo presentemente veramente mi pare havere patrone et signore, dove prima lo simile non mi pareva. Sua Reverendissima Signoria s'è vestita questa Pascha lo habito cardinalescho, nel qual in verità uno homo pareva. Resta che Vostra Excellentia solliciti di là de ponerli lo capello acioché habiamo lo cardinale compito et che presagio di qua sii bene incominzato.

Essendo ne la bottega cum lo speciale facessemo una lista de le cosse che mancavano in speciarìa et sono necessarie, la quale mando qui inclusa ad Vostra Excellentia, le quale cosse potrà mandare Vostra Excellentia mandando altre robe. E benché lo speciale habia com mi fatto dicta lista mostra impero de volere apatriare per tanto vede Vostra Excellentia se li pare di mandarne un altro. Altro per questa non scrivo, se non che me ricomando ali piedi di Vostra Excellentia la quale suplico che ale altre mie lettere dii bona et iocunda

risposta; la quale Dio felicitò nel stato suo per sua infinita misericordia. Datum Strigonii quarta madii 1492.

Eiusdem illustrissime ducalis Dominacionis servitor

Augustus Bemcius physicus

*5. Agostino Benci to Tommaso Fusco*

8 February 1496 Esztergom

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2. f. 5.

Vestigia database no. 2529

The physician is writing about the day-to-day concerns of the archbishop's staff and pleading with Fusco for help in order to be paid.

Eximie doctor et maior honoris, dapoi la partita vostra per sino alo presente zorno non ho saputo di voi; né me ne meraviglio per non essere ritornato messo niuno de là, pur spero tutto vui esser sani, e che ala ricevuta de questa, seriti zonti aporto bono per Dio grazia, che in vero credo che lo tempo habiati hauto alo proposito vostro, salvo se non fusse stato tanto fredo quanto è stato qui lo quale da lo dì de la purificazione fino a mo' è stato tanto e tale che non si poteva a partire, dove comprendo Dio havervi facta bella grazia di qua havervi levato essemdovi innanti la partita manchate le legne che se la bursa non vi havesti aitato, haresti imparato se non l'avesti saputo di fare lo sono de la cichogna, ma forsi lo havisti facto per la strada che Dio non voglia. Qua anchora cresse denaro dicto fredo ogni dì neva; et io mi ripezzo al meglio che posso. Acìo che a primo numero di state se potiamo vedere, diriti a Pietro Maria Montolino che ebbi la lettera sua e vitti quanto mi advisava dello suo cavallo, ma che non è anchora zonto; se farà menato, farrò quanto mio fosse. Io non ho se non uno famiglio, e non ho cavallo, però non posso mandare a vedere che ne sii; me è dicto che è in Javerino. Lo vostro vino non è anchora venduto, credo lo venderò in grosso ala corte de la Regina, (però) cum li dinari in mano.

Post hoc io ho una assignacione de la Reale Maestà a Piero Antonio Calderini di ducati 124, perché haria caro, lui me li desse inanci la partita. Senza dare altro disturbo a Sua Maestà vi voria pregare che se possete cum honore vostro, come credo possiati, scrivesti a dicto Pietro Antonio una lettera de bona maniera e calda per parte de lo Reverendissimo pregandolo che mi volesse avere per raccomandato e per suo amore volermi spazare senza dirne altro alo Reverendissimo. E se pur non vi par farlo senza saputa di sua Reverendissima Signoria, vi prego ge lo dicati e servitimi de bono inchiostro come ho speranza

in vui, et voiati per lo primo messo a scrivere et drizatila a me. Altro non ho a dirvi, se no che a vui mi raccomando e per voi posso cossa alcuna di qua advisatimi che mi sforzarò servirvi di bon core Strigonii VIIIa februarii 1496

Tuus Augusti Bencius

Diti a don Zoane che ala partita sua non li volsi dare molestia, ma che li ricordo mi ha dare ducati 21 i che li vinci su ale scancie di messer Tadeo mezo in stufa de lo governatore, mezo de una brete. Se vi pare di fare la lettera a Piero Antonio senza dirlo a Reverendissimo, fatilo perché non voio che se Idio alto ma più presto alo camtelino nevi signoria mi racomandariti.

### *6. Agostino Benci to Ippolito I d'Este*

4 March 1496 Esztergom

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2. f. 7.

Vestigia database no. 2537

Benci demands money from the archbishop in a forceful manner.

Illustrissime et Reverendissime Domine mi observandissime. Volendo io in questi proximi zorni passati una assignacione da la Serenissima Regina sopra a quella lettera factami da Vostra Reverendissima Signoria per comto de parte di mio salario; me è stato non solo posto in dubio di non me la volere fare, ma quasi manifestò segno sinistro. E questo dico no perché el vesco(vo) di Agria dice esserli stato promesso tute le decime de lo archiepiscopato et volerle di che se cossì fusse. Non so di chi mi possa lamentare o di Vostra Reverendissima Signoria ovvero de oficali di Quella, perché mi do ad intendere dal uno di dui o dal uno e l'altro essere stato deluso. Da Vostra Reverendissima Signoria non credo extimando Quella non volere che quello pocho che essa me deve lo quale e tuto quello ho avanzato in anni nove in servirla in Ungaria che io lo perda, ovvero al presente non lo habia che se cossì è et anche come di sopra ho dicto; cioè che la Maestà Reale non habia havere dicte decime. Prego et supplico Vostra Reverendissima Signoria che mi voglia fare una assignacione al dicto veschoo di Agria ovvero dove meglio a Quella si parerà acioché essemdo qui possi lo mio havere e di quello prevalerme ne le occurencie mie; che se cossì farrà Vostra Reverendissima Signoria, farrà cossa degna di principe et conveniente ad ogni vero et bon patrone, ali pedi del quale di continuo mi raccomando e Dio lui conservi lomgamente Strignoi 4e marcy 1496

Eiusdem illustrissime et reverendissime domine

Servitor minime Augusti Bencius

7. *Agostino Benci to Tommaso Fusco*

16 March 1496 Esztergom

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Est. Amb. Ungh. b. 2. f. 6.

Vestigia database no. 2536

The physician is writing Tommaso Fusco about his wine trading business.

Messer Tommaso, io ho venduto lo vino vostro in nel modo che ve dirò. Io ne ho dato pinte cento per ducati uno fiorini 90. Sono stati cubuli 96; nel 8 pinte lo cubulo; e secondo me riferise lo famiglio mio, ge ne usi cubuli almeno 3 molto torbidi, e lui è stato sempre in presenza adarlo. Prima che cominzasse lo vaxo, feci mesurare ad uno camtaro di legno alo celario del preposito de Sacro Stefano 8 pinte di aqua e signarlo e cum quella misura se [si è?] venduto. Solo mi maraviglio di uno vaso. Tale esse usito sì pocho vino che almeno extimaxo usir che vino chiaro 110 cubuli non so dove si venga la magagne. Li farò di oro e se voriti, ve li porterò a piccolo che farò li mei le spexe che lì sono et ocorse sono queste se io per octo pintx de vino che amdo ad re inprese .Se io ho dato alo clavigeio de lo lectore benché dubiti che non habia robato quid aliud scribam nescio risi ut valeas et domino nostro reverendissimo me plurimam commendationum facias rogo e ceterum amico signor Salvios dices cancellario ant nostro chies equun siuis aduch non venisse cuius sit culpa ignoro six vale et me ama Strigony 16 marcy 1496

Pur ozi ho receputo una lettera di Pietro Maria Montolino data in nove città e per risposta li basti quanto altie volete ho scritto

Tuus Augusti Bencius

9. *Agostino Benci to Ercole I d'Este*

25–26 April 1498 Pavia

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Misc. Mat. Medici e medicina b. 19.

Agostino Benci informs the Duke of Ferrara of Ippolito's travel and health.

Illustrissime et excellentissime Princeps domine observandissime, se persino al presemte non ho scripto ad Vostra Eccellenzia de lo Illustrissimo et Reverendissimo monsignor mio è stato per esser Sua Reverendissima Signoria stata sana persino alo sabato sancto, nel qual zorno, essendo la prestata ad una abatia apresso Milano a miglia 7 per devotione, mi mandò a chiamare, et ritrovai la dicta cun qualche lasitudine et alteracione, ma non febre, de che in

Gusago, luoco apresso al predicto doe miglia, la cominzai ad evacuare a cui sucresse alterazione. Se partì poi Sua Reverendissima Signoria la octava de lo sabato santo, e venne a Pavia cun cuntinua piova et vento, et essendo Sua Reverendissima Signoria cun pochi panni fu caxone che li venne la febre de cui ozzi se aspectava lo terzo parosismo ma zà è pasato hora doe del tempo che lo soleva invadere de che sono certo che non li soprazunzea altro, solo li è rimasto uno poco di fluxo lo quale reputo più a bene che a male. Questo mi ha parso de scrivere ad Vostra Eccellenzia per fare parte de lo debito mio. Dapoi recuperata la totale sanità, ne advisuo di novo Vostra Eccellenzia. Ali pedi de la Quale de continuo mi raccomando. Papie, 25 aprilis, 1498

Eiusdem V. Illustrissime et Excellentissime Domine

Post scripta: Hieri sira non soprazonse altra febre et anche lo fluxo non ha molestata Sua Reverendissima Signoria. questa notte dove spero de proximo la sua integra sanità. 26<sup>a</sup> aprilis

Servitor minimus,

Augustinus Bemtius

*10. Agostino Benci to Tommaso Fusco*

6 September 1498 Ferrara

Signature: ASMo ASE C. Misc. Mat. Medici e medicina b. 19.

Agostino Benci requests Tommaso Fusco's aid in communicating with Ippolito and other staff members.

Messer Thomaxo mio caro, vui sapiti come desiderava de havere certe lettere da lo Reverendissimo nostro le quale per fino al presente ho aspetate et non le havendo haute, dubito o che Sua Signoria non le habia voluto cometere ovvero no li siano state racordate, però vi prego per questa et suplico, mi voiati servire de bono inchiostro et racordarle al dicto a cui ancora io similmente le scrivo, ma sapendo vui la cossa, non la replicarò a Sua Signoria. Iterum vi prego che per mezo de messer Ieronymo Vazabil o de chi vi parerà vedati fare una lettera ducale de passo, possa comdure le robe mie cum sit che quasi niente habia li et anche intendo portare qualche forma de formezo et Malvaxia de le quale anche vui ne hariti parte. Le lettere sono de lo Reverendissimo, lettera de passo, lettere al duca, a messer Zoanni Lucha ricomandandoli la cossa mia et amche messer Tito Stroze a don Alfonso de lo Regazo. Aspeto da vui risposta cun el tuto et di cò ve ne prego et sii presto et a voi mi raccomando Ferrarie, sexta septy 1498. Questa matina manzo cun messer Pandolfino et messer Mateo et credo torro el pasto lupino. vostro Augusti Bencius

*Unfinished note, unsigned, complied to the letter, with stamp (although the sample is no longer legible):*

Illustrissimo Signor mio, questa note è sopraiuncta tanta aqua da mare e da monte che grossissima asai più qua de soto del consueto. Me dole el core che trovi questi argeni in tal desordene che dubito forte de mal asai. Se li zudizi, pur avese fato il suo debito, delivrare la coronela nova che fo bon ricordo il mio a farli perché adeso si vide il bisogno. Non dubitaria che dubito sfordandomi l'aqua, non la potse tenere che farà dano asai ala Signoria Vostra che serà il debito Suo portare la pina aché merita. Signore, non starò de dire queste parole per mia fidelissima servitù a Vi a mal che volga et di far ogni l'ora. Il mio debito è sorzarmi con la vita, tenere li argeni...

*(Translated by András Cser)*