

A physician-diplomat from the time of the renaissance ¹

The history of medicine knows several cases – both in Hungary and abroad – when the court physicians of medieval or Renaissance rulers accomplished important diplomatic missions. This chapter of medical history should not be neglected, as the position and esteem of the physicians was influenced not only by their medical activities but by such diplomatic roles as well, while the general historical significance of their public actions is not without interest for the historian of medicine. In that age diplomatic service demanded the same special personal relationship that was manifested in the confidence existing between the court physician and his patient. Who was better suited to keep the secrets of the state than the one to whom both the bodily troubles and the spiritual anxieties of the head of state were revealed?

From the 14th century onwards we know several cases when the court physicians of the Hungarian kings performed diplomatic tasks,² and conversely, quite a few of the emissaries of foreign sovereigns appearing in Hungary belonged to the medical profession. The use of the *archiater* in the field of diplomacy was especially common in Hungary during the reigns of *King Sigismund*, and later *King Matthias Corvinus*. There is a strong probability that the practice of giving the outstanding multilingual doctors some diplomatic commission originated in the Orient.

Timotheos was not only the court physician of the Emperor *Justin the Younger* (565–598), but played a considerably role in the diplomacy of Byzantium.³ *Fritz Baer* writes in the introductory chapter of his collection of documents⁴ that from the early to the late Middle Ages there are a large number of Jews, who were well known as doctors and also played some important diplomatic role.⁵

This „identity” of the Jewish physician and diplomat became so widespread in the courts of Castile, Aragon and Navarre that even after the end of the Moorish Khalifate the high ranking Jewish councillors of the Christian kings were given the epithet „alfaquim” – whether they were doctors or not.⁶ But not only Jewish physicians are known in the early period of diplomacy.

One of the typical representatives of the late-medieval physician-diplomats was *Bartholomaeus de Plumbino*.⁷ Here we are not concerned with his important medical work but

¹ Publ. in: *Communicationes de Historia Artis Medicinae* 73–74 (1974) pp. 13–26. Written with E. Schultheisz.

² Schultheisz E. – Tardy L.: Olasz orvosok Magyarországon. (Italian physicians in Hungary.) *Orvosi Hetilap* (Medical Weekly), 1965. pp. 659–660.; 1966. pp. 1757–1750.

³ Bloch, I.: *Byzantinische Medizin*. (Handbuch der Geschichte der Medizin). Berlin, 1901. Bd. 1. p. 6.

⁴ Baer, F.: *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*. Bd. I. Aragonien und Navarra. Berlin, 1929.

⁵ The epithet „alfaquim” (derived from the Arab „hakim”) referred to their profession, but was later naturally supplanted by the term „medicus”, „physicus”, etc., which was never missing from the name of the diplomats who also practiced medicine.

⁶ Krauss, S.: *Geschichte der jüdischen Aerzte*. Wien, 1940. p. 16. – Cf. Mirety Y Sans, J.: Les médecins juifs de Pierre IV roi d’Aragon. *Revue des Études Juives* 57 (1909) pp. 268–278.

⁷ Schultheisz, E.: Colcodei seu liber de peste des Bartholomaeus Squarcialupis de Plumbino. *Sudhoff’s Archiv* 44 (1960) pp. 333–341.; – Über das Antidotarium des Bartholomaeus Squarcialupis. *Zur Geschichte der Pharmazie* 13

consider only his diplomatic activities. The free state of Ragusa (Today Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia) once flourished under the protection of the Hungarian kings. By historical right it claimed the islands of Curzola, Lesina and Brazza, which King Sigismund of Hungary was inclined to cede.⁸ According to a document dated from 14 August 1413 the town sent a deputation to Buda to present its case, and Magister Bartholomaeus de Plumbino was a member of the mission. The party included another physician-diplomat: Magister *Jacobus de Saligheris de Paulus*. Both are mentioned as „phisici et salariati communis Ragusi”.⁹

The important role often played by doctors in European diplomacy is also testified by the activities of *Jacobus de Castro*, the court physician of the Holy Roman Emperor *Frederick III*. Only a few surviving prescriptions and some personal data bear witness to his medical practice,¹⁰ but his important political missions carried out in the service of the Emperor are known in details. The most outstanding was his mission to Milan in 1447. *Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini*, who later became Pope Pius II was a member of his committee.¹¹

According to our knowledge the first physician in the „world diplomacy” connecting Europe with Asia was the Spanish-Jewish *Isaac Beg*, the court physician of the Persian ruler. Doctor Isaac as Persian ambassador went round the courts of Europe (including that of Matthias of Hungary, one of the most farseeing monarchs of his age) to establish the „Grand Alliance” against the Ottoman Empire, threatening both East and West with absorption. Before describing Isaac’s role let us make a review of the international setting which called forth his missions.

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Before its complete establishment the Ottoman Empire was several times on the verge of collapse. In 1402 *Timur Lenk* (Tamerlane) defeated Sultan Bayazid, but in a relatively short time the then still very flexible Ottoman administrative and military system was restored and continued expanding in all directions. It met the strongest resistance not in the European states, engaged in continuous conflict with each other, but in the other power of Asia, also confessing the faith of *Mohammed*, and in Georgia. The Ottomans fought long wars of alternating success with the Karamanid khans, their most dangerous rivals after the collapse of the Seljuk Empire, who also wanted to make use of European, first of all Hungarian help against the Ottomans. An even greater rival of Sultan *Mehmed* (Mohammed) II was the Turkoman *Uzun Hasan*, who considered himself heir of Timur, became the

(1961) pp. 28–29.; 14 (1962) pp. 7–10.

⁸ Gelcich, B.: *Diplomatarium Ragusinum*. Bp., 1887. p. 260., p. 288. ff.

⁹ Ibid. p. 226.

¹⁰ Kühnel, H.: *Die Leibärzte der Habsburger bis zum Tode Kaiser Friedrichs III*. (Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs, No. 11.) Wien, 1958. p. 20.

¹¹ Kühnel, H.: *Mittelalterliche Heilkunde in Wien*. Graz – Köln, 1965. p. 96. – Cf. Krones, F.: *Leonora von Portugal*. (Mitteilungen des Historischen Vereins f. Steiermark. No. 49.) 1902. p. 69.

ruler of Persia, declared the Sultan his vassal and demanded a yearly tribute from him.

All the more or less independent Asiatic neighbours, Christian or Mahommedan, of the Ottomans sought support against Mehmed II in the rule of Uzun Hasan. In 1458 the last Emperor of Trebizond, *David Komnenos*, gave the hand of the daughter of his predecessor-brother, *Kalo-Johannes*, to Uzun Hasan, thus establishing a close connection between the small Hellene state and the Turkoman Khan sitting on the throne of Persia. For some time Georgia too was drawn into this relationship, especially as Trebizond had long been able to exist only under the protection of the rulers of Georgia.

Receiving news of the successes of Uzun Hasan the European states threatened by the Turks abandoned their fond idea of a Crusade, to replace it with the conception of an alliance with the anti-Ottoman Asiatic states. This kept up the spirit of hope and confidence.

In the summer of 1454 the then Bishop of Siena, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, the later Pius II wrote to Bishop *János Vitéz*, the Chancellor of Hungary, that the times has come to form a league of two continents, calling in one camp the Mohammedan Karamanids the Orthodox Georgians and the European Catholic powers.¹²

Aeneas Silvius – already as Pope Pius II – in 1459 convened the Congress of Mantua with the aim of realizing this common action. It would not be without interest to describe in details why the Asiatic powers, or rather the representatives of Uzun Hasan and the rulers of Georgia met an atmosphere full of unjustified distrust, taking the place of the enthusiasm of the beginning. Here it is sufficient to say that the idea of the common European-Asian action did not materialize, though in the following one and a half decades the extensive successes of the Ottomans gave a new, stronger impetus to the bold plans, forged mainly by the Signoria of Venice and Uzun Hasan.

The ruler of Persia had contacts with the largest Venetian patrician houses and knew the position of the prosperous city-state, greatly endangered by the expanding Turks. At the end of 1463 Venice sent to Persia its non official envoy, *Lazzaro Querini*, who spent there many years. In 1464 and 1465 emissaries arrived in Venice from Uzun Hasan, in order to prepare an alliance. Venice began to show a serious interest in this only when it became obvious that her war with Turkey was bringing few successes.

It was a difficult hour for Venice when the envoys of Uzun Hasan and Constantine of Georgia, the desperate enemies of Ottoman power, arrived in order to give the common action against Mehmed II a positive form. In 1471 Lazzaro Querini returned,¹³ accompanied by another emissary of Uzun Hasan, who was known to, have been in Venice in March 1471, planning to go to Rome in order to convince the Pope of the importance of the Persian alliance.

¹² *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini*. Hrsg.: R. Wolkan. Wien, 1918. p. 551.

¹³ Cornet, E.: *Le guerre dei Veneti nell'Asia*. Vienna, 1856. pp. 23–24., p. 28. – Cf. Berchet, G.: *La repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*. Torino, 1865. p. 5.

By this time the republic of San Marco was already the chief protagonist of the alliance with Persia and Georgia,¹⁴ Hungary and Poland were also much concerned with driving the Turks back and followed the promising operations of Uzun Hasan with close attention. Their diplomatic emissaries soon arrived to his court and accompanied him in his campaigns.¹⁵ The first European diplomatic contact with Persia was through Lazzaro Querini, who in 1471 returned to Venice, accompanied by Uzun Hasan's representative, whose intention was to visit several European sovereigns in order to find out, if they would be willing to take part in a coordinated campaign to be started simultaneously from Asia and Europe. This mission still had an exploratory character, but was soon repeated with a very wide scale of tasks. The earlier delegates of Uzun Hasan went only to Venice, while the new envoy had to negotiate with a number of rulers. Considering the contemporary facilities for travelling and communication, and in view of the permanent discord of the European states, these two journeys represented a formidable task, a unique venture in the early history of diplomacy.

Uzun Hasan's bold representative, who undertook an unprecedented diplomatic task, was the physician Isaac according to the Venetian documents „Spanish by nationality, Jewish by religion”.¹⁶ Not all the details and circumstances of this mission are known, but by fitting the fragments together, the main features can be reconstructed.

Looking at these events from the perspective of half a millenium we fully admit the intricate and dangerous nature of the work performed by the Venetian, Polish and Hungarian diplomats in the court of Uzun Hasan, but we have to point out that the tasks of doctor Isaac – or as he was often referred too: Isaac Beg – were incomparably more difficult and exacting. The representatives to the European powers had to observe if Uzun Hasan was capable of resisting the Ottomans militarily, and if his military preparations came up to the expectations of his would-be allies. Doctor Isaac, on the other hand, had a more formidable task: while also having to obtain first-hand informations on the intentions and military capacities of many possible allies, he had to coordinate the steps of the European Christian rulers too, immersed in embittered quarrels. In fact Isaac – together with the Signoria of Venice – had to create a working alliance.

The instruction given by the Senate of Venice on 10th September 1471 to its envoy, *Caterino Zeno*, shows that Lazzaro Querini was accompanied from Persia by an emissary of Uzun Hasan. *Jorga* convincingly argues (relying on a careful chronological analysis) that Querini's companion was Isaac Beg, who was sent with the Venetian partly as interpreter, partly as diplomatic message-carrier. In the following September Isaac returned, no longer as simple „orator” but as „magnus

¹⁴ *Cornet* op. cit. p. 30. – Cf. *Monumenta Hungariae Judaica*. Tom. XII. Budapest, 1969. pp. 27–44.

¹⁵ The reports of the Venetian envoys and other sources testify that the Hungarian emissaries were present at the court of Uzun Hasan and were witnesses of the lost battle of Terdshan (Erzinjan).

¹⁶ *Cornet*, op. cit. p. 28.

orator”, „legatus” or „ambassador”, bringing Zeno’s letter from the Persian camp, to carry out his second, highly important European mission, which can be studied from documentary evidence.¹⁷

Having received the extremely favourable military news sent by *Zeno* from Persia, brought and – according to the sources – very effectively presented by Isaac, Venice began meeting his obligations as an ally. The Republic sent another emissary, *Giosafatte Barbaro*, after Caterino Zeno to Uzun Hasan. But while Zeno took only a few fine precious jewels and some rare cloth to the Persian court, Barbaro’s arrival meant six big and fifty smaller guns, a large number of other arms and munition. The Doge of Venice, *Niccolo Tròn*, made no secret that all that was the result of doctor Isaac’s mission. He instructed Barbaro to tell the Persian ruler that „*from Isaac, the Jewish doctor, who, after a long and tiring journey through Kaffa, arrived in Venice and spent several months there, he learnt of the Persian ruler’s magnanimous willingness and of his determination to turn against the common enemy, the Ottomans.*”

He was also informed by Isaac of „*what means of war his Persian Majesty needed for his further military actions; their delivery will be taken care of. On his way back from Rome, Ambassador Isaac on his own initiative but with our full approval visited His Majesty the King of Hungary, in order to convince and induce him once more to enter the war energetically against the common enemy. With a view to this, we have sent an envoy to the King of Hungary, and sent him another letter by Isaac. Matthias ordered his army in Belgrade to harry the Serbian territory occupied by the Turks, which was done*”.¹⁸ The doge made Barbaro’s duty to enlighten Uzun Hasan that he should not give credence to the intriguing rumors of an impending peace between King Matthias and the Turk.

There are two notable elements in the instructions of Niccolo Tròn, first that Doctor Isaac arrived to the European allies via Kaffa, and secondly that at the time of Barbaro’s departure Isaac sojourned at the Hungarian court already for the second time.

In *Iván Nagy’s* and *Albert Nyáry’s* collection of documents¹⁹ there is a document in Latin entitled „The Latin translation of the letter of Husun Hassan sent to King Matthias around 1472”.²⁰ It says that the ambassador of His Majesty Uzun Hasan appeared before *Constantius de Sarra*, a notary in Kaffa, asking him to translate word by word and authentically from Persian into Latin his letter of credence received from his master, leaving out nothing from or adding nothing to the original. The notary met his wish through the intervention of an Armenian interpreter named *Coratolli*.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 41. – Cf. Babinger, Fr.: *Johannes Darius*. München, 1961. (*Bayerische Akad. d. Wissensch., Phil.-Hist. Klasse. Sitzungsberichte*, 1961. Heft 5. p. 67.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 68–75.

¹⁹ *Magyar diplomáciai emlékek Mátyás király korából*. (Hungarian Diplomatic Relics from the Age of King Matthias.) Vol. IV. Budapest, 1878.

²⁰ Ibid. pp. 293–295. – Cf. Minorsky VI.: The Middle East in Western Politics in the 13th–17th centuries. In: *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*. Vol. XXVII. P. IV, op. cit. pp. 114–115.

The address of Matthias shows an Oriental abundance of epithets: „*I humbly speak to you Matthias, King of Hungary, as one addresses a mighty Lord, whose authority, the authority of an outstanding and wise Lord, is obeyed by everyone, as the mighty Lord of Lords is being obeyed. I speak to you from my heart, as to my true friend.*”

Isaac’s letter of credence calls on Matthias that he and the other Christian rulers „*come and join us, take action, gather their armies, unite them as our good friends and European allies, and march on the Turkish Sultan. I am also starting from here to drive this man from his throne. I trust that by the grace and mercy of God this will succeed according to our hopes and wishes. We beg God that His Allmightiness carry these plans of us to a favourable conclusion and avert all obstacles.*” This was delivered from the Mohammedan ruler to the Christian kings by the Jewish envoy and court physician.

The letter of credence addressed to the Doge of Venice differs from the one written to King Matthias and another to *Stefan cel Mare*, the Voivode of Moldavia, both in tone and in structure. In the two latter cases the contact was on the stage of the ceremonial establishment of relations, while with Venice the tone reflected an established and warm friendship.

This later document did not bear the mark of de Sarra’s notarian services. The text shows that the translator, probably of Oriental origin, had difficulties with his task and his solutions were not always successful.

After an address similar to the above mentioned Uzun Hassan affirms that „*we are bound to You by friendship and love... it is becoming that your envoys and messengers continuously sojourn with us and inform us of the developments.*” Then he gives an account of his conquests, adding that all that „*was achieved not by force or by domineering, but by goodness and rightness, and we have put all our perfidious enemies to shame, thanks and glory be to God the Most High.*” Then he continues that one great and powerful enemy is still to be defeated, this is the Turkish Sultan. The conclusion of his letter is also written in an easy, direct *manner*: „*I intend to tell you many other things, but our doctor of medicine, whom we send you as a man of wise speech, our adherent Isaac, the great doctor, in whom we have great trust, will put before you everything in the right manner and in all details, in conformity with our instructions, Whatever inner and secret agreement you are going to negotiate with him, or he with you, we will approve of it and confirm it, just as if we had been present at the making of the agreement. Dated at the beginning of the lunar month of Rabemel, that is July, in the 877th year of Mohammed, in our style.*”²¹

In this letter Isaac is not explicitly called ambassador, but there is more than ample evidence to his high rank by the display of the extreme confidence of the Pesian ruler in his personality. The fact that the results of the negotiations between the Signoria of Venice and Isaac were

²¹ Berchet, op. cit. pp. 114–115.

acknowledged as of binding character, makes it obvious that the „magnus medicus”, or using the customary title of the European courts: archiater, was a diplomat of enormous knowledge and experience, who must have represented Hasan’s interest on several previous occasions.

After identifying the person of the Persian envoy in King Matthias’ Court it is worth while studying the times of issue of the above diplomas. What basis do they offer for establishing the time of Isaac’s arrival in Europe? Among the Venetian documents that refer to Isaac by name the earliest one appears to be the instructions of the Signoria of Venice for Giosafatte Barbaro dated from 28th January 1472.²² In that case it would be clearly impossible for the notary of Kaffa to prepare the Latin versions of the credentials for King Matthias and Stefan cel Mare. But during all its existence the Republic of Venice started the *annus Domini* with March 1. Consequently the real date of the document is January 28, 1473, and not 1472! Then the first documentary occurrence of Isaac Beg is September 12, 1472, when the Senate of Venice informed *Cornaro Frederico*, its envoy at the Holy See, of the arrival of doctor Isaac, the envoy of Uzun Hasan and that he proceeded to the Pope. Ten days later the Signoria in its new letter to Cornaro mentions that Isaac (who is not named, but the reference to him is clear) came to Venice via Kaffa. On the same day the Senate wrote to *Zaccaria Barbaro*, its representative in Naples, that the newly arrived emissary of Uzun Hasan who had once been to Venice with Lazzaro Querini and returned in the company of Caterino Zeno, will seek an audience from the King of Sicily, and the success of the audience should be pressed by all means available.

All this gives sufficient evidence that the authentic translation of the credential letter of Isaac Beg, arriving in Venice via Kaffa and acting there first in September 1472, was made in the same year in Kaffa by the notary Constantius de Sarra. The calendar of Venice explains how Isaac could appear in Venice already in the previous year (1471) together with Querini, and return to Persia in the same year, as testified by the letter addressed to Zaccaria Barbaro. In his first mission Isaac did not need a letter of credence, as he came only in the capacity as Querini’s interpreter, (though he was referred to as orator) taking the message of Uzun Hasan. Next time he came on a diplomatic mission, attested by the Latin translation of his credentials. It is beyond doubt that this letter was written in July 1472.

Let us now turn to Isaac Beg’s appearance in the court of King Matthias Corvinus.

On 12 September the Senate of Venice wrote a letter to its envoy at the Holy See informing him of the arrival of the envoy of Uzun Hasan, the sovereign of Persia, „Spanish by nationality, Jewish by faith”, who gave an account of the large preparations of his master against the Turks.²³ Thirteen days later, on 25 September 1472 the Senate on the occasion of the arrival of another

²² *Cornet*, op. cit. pp. 68–75.

²³ „Fuit ad presentiam nostram unus orator illustrissimi domini Ussoni Cassani natione Hispanus fide autem Hebreus, et de bona dispositione prefati domini offendendi Turchum multa exposuit” (*Cornet*, op. cit. p. 39.)

emissary of Uzun Hasan, Hadjimahomed (who in contrast to the continuously travelling Isaac stayed in Venice maintaining the contact with the Senate) informed the Persian ruler that Ambassador Isaac was received by the Republic with great joy and honour, and that he was already on his way to Rome to act before the Holy Father upon his instructions.²⁴ If we follow his itinerary to Venice, we can see when and how he first entered the territory of Hungary as an envoy. His route from Kaffa to Venice can be ascertained from the direct references contained in the contemporary sources. From Kaffa the customary route passed through Moncastro (Neszterfejevár, Cetatea Alba) and Vaslui, Cancel's work is convincing in this respect.²⁵ As the credential letters translated into Latin by the notary of Kaffa were addressed to Stefan cel Mare and King Matthias respectively, it is quite certain that the doctor travelled from Kaffa through Moldavia to Poland, where *King Casimir*, too, received the appeal of Uzun Hasan, then he went on to Hungary and from there to Venice. Consequently Isaac first came to Hungary as the envoy of Uzun Hasan in 1472,²⁶ at a date after July 15, in order to urge the king to take part in the anti Turkish coalition.

From Hungary Isaac travelled to Venice, where the Senate prepared a written appraisal of the situation: „*We have been pleased to see the envoy of His Majesty and our heart is happy that we heard of His Majesty. His justness and valour won him fame all over the world, especially pleased us, and his splendid victories please us even more. We praise and accept his fine wish and have come to the conclusion that it is not enough for us to praise his actions merely with our words but in the first place we must act. This year we have made our fleet much stronger, it is strengthened by the papal and royal fleets, so everything is ready for the attack upon the Asiatic shores, by which His Majesty's wish, the occupation of the Turkish provinces can be achieved. – It is to our liking that the envoy is going to visit the Pope and the other Christian princes. We encouraged him to make a call on the King of Naples as well, so that His Majesty might also join us as an ally, as after the Pope his dignity is the highest in Italy. Thus after his return the envoy could report of the best preparations, including ours, who are ready for the attack upon the common enemy, and we shall neglect nothing that can be done, and if His Majesty is also launching his attack, there is no doubt*

²⁴ Cornet, op. cit. p. 48. According to Berchet (op. cit. pp. 24–26.) Doctor Isaac christianized in Rome. The following piece of Venetian folklore refers to his conversion:

Novamente ha mandato Usoncassano
Al papa Sisto un suo ambasciatore
El qual a Roma è facto cristiano,
Et a ciascun famellio servitore
El sancto Padre cum sua propria mono
Gli donò vestimenti e fato onore.
Or son tornati verso la Turchia
Dove Usoncassan tien la signoria.

(Medin, A.: Per l'origine della voce „sancassan”. Le geste di Husun Hasan in un cantare del sec. XV. *Ani del R. Istituto Veneto de Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*. Tomo 87, P. II, p. 813. – Cf. Todesco, V.: Cassiano o uno Scia di Pesia? *Ibid.* Tomo 86, P. II., pp. 1396–1387.) Obviously Isaac later returned to the faith of his ancestors.

²⁵ Cornet, op. cit. pp. 32–33.

²⁶ Cancel, P.: *Data epistolei lui Uzun-Hasan*. Bucuresti, 1912. p. 32.

that the enemy, divided between attacks coming from many sides, will be not only defeated, but our victory will be an extremely glorious one. And when we thus persuaded the envoy by word and dispersed his doubts, we set him off to Rome, supplied him with suitable clothing, gave him presents and respects, and caused a letter written to our envoy at the Holy See, that he should be of help to him and recommend him both to His Holiness and at Naples, too, that they should receive him there for negotiations. We have spent on his cloths a hundred ducats in addition to his proper daily provision."²⁷

From Venice Isaac proceeded to see the Pope, to which he was commissioned by his ruler, too.²⁸ The Pope was doing really serious efforts to realize the united anti-Turkish Christian front, both in the diplomatic and in the military field. He created a fleet under Admiral *Caraffa*, which sailed eastward to unite with the Venetian and Neapolitan fleet, but they were unable to win any decisive victory. The signs of the future break among the three Italian powers were becoming visible. It was noticed by Isaac, too, who openly expressed his dissatisfaction over the Pope's answer, when he returned to Buda.²⁹ Isaac's second stay in Buda is mentioned in the instructions given to Giosafatte Barbaro on January 28 1472 (in reality, according to the present calendar 1473). „*Doctor Isaac, Uzun Hasan's first Ambassador returned from Rome and on his own account, but with our full approval, visited His Majesty the King of Hungary in order to convince and induce him once more to enter the war against the common enemy.*” This portion also shows that the doctor had already paid a visit to Matthias, following his call on Voivode Stefan cel Mare, but previous to his arrival in Venice.³⁰

Isaac's negotiations with Matthias Corvinus were not successful. The King's envoys returned from the Italian courts without any promise of serious financial aid for the war, while his discords, with his neighbours flared up again. The great Christian league envisaged by Uzun Hasan and promoted by the diplomatic negotiations of doctor Isaac in Moldavia, Poland, Italy and Hungary failed to materialize.

There were however some results: Venice did support Uzun Hasan by sending galleys, munition and some persons well versed in the European ways of warfare. This partial result undoubtedly owes much to Isaac Beg, the envoy of Uzun Hasan.

As the letter of the Senate of the Venetian Republic sent to its *chargé d'affairs* in Buda, *Alvise Sagondino* states,³¹ in January 1473 Isaac Beg was still in Buda. In the same year in August there is a reference to the emissaries of King Matthias sent to Uzun Hasan in the report of Caterino Zeno from Persia. No doubt, this was a reciprocation by Matthias to Uzun Hasan's sending him an envoy

²⁷ *Cornet*, op. cit. pp. 39–40.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 52.

²⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 73–75.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 72.

³¹ *Ibid.*

in the person of Doctor Isaac.

The last date when Isaac Beg occurs in the diplomatic correspondence of Venice is 15 February 1474 (1473 by the Venetian calendar). When the Signoria in his letter to Uzun Hasan spoke with appreciation about the way the Persian ruler kept his word, and also mentioned the services of Isaac Beg and Hadjimahomed.³² It is not without significance that the letter spoke of Isaac as the physician of Uzun Hasan. The credential letter addressed to the Doge called him *magnus medicus*, i. e. *archiater*, court physician.

In Cancel's opinion doctor Isaac – in accordance with his efforts to further the unity of the Christian countries – had an important role in bringing about a reconciliation between Matthias Corvinus and Stefan cel Mare, the Voivode of Moldavia.

Isaac's further career may be traced in the Encyclopaedia Judaica.³³ If he is identical with the doctor Isaac who was a court physician in Poland around 1504, we are unable to tell what happened to him after completing his European missions and how he moved from Persia to Poland. It is true that there was an active diplomatic contact maintained between the Persian court and the Kingdom of Poland, with frequent sending of envoys. Doctor Isaac, too, was there in such a capacity. It is possible that after the death of Uzun Hasan in consequence of the troublous state of affairs in Persia, Isaac decided to transfer his activities to Poland, which he had already visited during the reign of Casimir IV and where he had good personal contacts.

We do not know the date either of his birth or death. According to some documents his father was „*Abraham of Jerusalem*”,³⁴ also known by the epithet „*of Trebizond*”,³⁵ consequently he may have entered the service of Persia through the wife of Uzun Hasan, who was the daughter of the Emperor of Trebizond.

We know that in 1502 doctor Isaac acted as the envoy of Lithuania, then closely associated with Poland, when he transmitted the personal message of King *Alexander* to the ruler of the Tartars of the Crimea.³⁶ There are further mentions of him in several documents from 1504.³⁷ Here Isaac appears as the court physician of *Andrew*, the Archbishop of Gniezno, the Primate of Poland.³⁸ The

³² Ibid. p. 127.

³³ Vol. VIII. Berlin, 1931. p. 49. – Cf. *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. VI. New York – London, 1906. p. 622.

³⁴ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1. c.

³⁵ „*Solicitationum ilium fuisse ab usumcassano, ut foedus cum ipso adversus Mahometem sanciret, refert Ioannes Arrivabenus in literis... ad Iacobum Cardinalem Papiensem: Venit, inquit, cum Hungaro orator Ussoncassam, qui ingentem exercitum pollicetur, modo Hungaro ad suscipienda quoque arma pecuniae hic demur nil se velle praeter dominium quod uxori debetur etc. Romae III. Septembris MCCCCLXXIV. De Isaaco Trapezuntino ab Ussumcassano ad Poloniae et Hungariae Reges misso ituroque ad Pontificem, et Venetos pro gerendo proximo vere cum aliis Regibus Christianis in Turcam sociali bello, Michovias... et Cromerus... meminere.*” Raynaldus Odoricus: *Annales*, Vol. XIX, Roma, 1663.

³⁶ Spuler, B.: *Die Goldene Horde*. Die Mongolen in Russland, 1223–1502. 2. Aufl. Wiesbaden, 1965. p. 225.

³⁷ *Ruszczo–Evrejszkij Archie*. Tom. III. S.-Peterburg, 1903. pp. 47–49.

³⁸ „...*ad petita Reverendissimi in Christo patris Domini Andreae Archiepiscopi Gneznensis et Primatis... admittimusque et consentimus tenore presentium mediante Judeo Isaac ipsius Domini Archiepiscopi fisico*”. (Ibid. p. 49.)

Significance of the doctor Isaac is better reflected in the interesting diploma of 10 May 1507 issued by *Sigismund I*, King of Poland, which recognizes the ancient Jewish nobility of Isaac.³⁹

Although the diploma of Sigismund was little more than a mark of royal favour, at least one statement in it must be regarded as authentic, viz. that doctor Isaac was not born in Poland, but „in regno nostro advena est”, came from abroad. Unfortunately the document does not give any serious clue as to whether Isaac went to Trebizond, and from there to Persia directly from Spain, or he was a Palestinian Sephardic Jew.

In 1509 he was still alive, as the taxes paid by the Jews of Cracow belonged to „the physician of the King, the Spanish Jew, doctor Isaac”, but a decree from 18 June 1510 stated that as a reward for the services rendered by the doctor Isaac, the King endowed his widow, Barsaba, and his children with all the privileges enjoyed by the deceased husband.⁴⁰

At the beginning of the 16th century there stood nothing in the way of any Central- or East European ruler to select his own physician from among the graduates of Padova, Bologna, Montpellier, or any other well-known medical faculty. This is especially true for the Polish court, whose Italian contacts were admittedly very strong. How is it then possible that doctor Isaac, whose knowledge derived from an entirely different source, could become a court physician in Poland?

In answering this question first we must make it clear that Isaac was not the archiater of the King of Poland, he was only one of the court physicians. Besides his personal qualities his prestige must have owed much to the fact that he used to be the archiater, confident and „roving ambassador” of one of the most powerful eastern sovereigns, Uzun Hasan, who was renown all over Europe. But his acceptance by the Polish court also meant the recognition of the medical school of which he was a representative.

True, here are no direct data available on the medical activities of Isaac Beg, or at least they have not come to light. But it cannot be a mere accident, that nearly all of the numerous documents dealing with his diplomatic activities stress that he was a physician, and add the epithet „doctor” to

³⁹ „*Sigismundus Dei Gracia rex Poloniae etc. Significamus tenore presentium, quibus expedit universis. Quomodo in presencia nostri et consiliariorum nostrorum his nobiscum existencium constituti. Generosus et nobilis Jacobus Wagorzowsky curialis noster et Thomas Czarnyczky recognoverunt, qualiter pro religionis affectu ducti visendi sepulcrum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi et tocius humani generis Salvatoris, postquam se in Hierusalem contulissent, certo cognoverunt ex judeis illic commorantibus, quibus licitum est credi, quia Sara uxor Abraam, filia vero alterius Abraham judeorum Jerosolimitanorum est germana soror Isaac cognominati Izaczek phisici judei nostri Casimiriam incolentis et ab eodem patre eorum Abraam utrosque legitime processisse atque, ut idem judei jerosolimitani testificati sunt, oriundus esse, non ex ignobili judaicae gentis familia honestesque apud eos conservati, prout perspicuo est ex literis ipsius Sare per prefatos: Iacobum Wagorzewsky et Thomam Czarnyczky huic Isaac phisico allatis; quibus etiam lucido reddidit ipsum verum fratrem et germanum illius esse. Nos itaque, ne de predicto Isaac, quia nostro in regno advena est, quidam judeorum aliquid pretendat de generis obscuritate moliri aut cum propter hic defectumfamiliae suae, ex qua ortus est convicio objurgare vel sibi ignobilitatem judaice gentis obicere possit, hanc coram nobis recognitionem sic factam ad omnium, quorum interest, noticiam deducimus tenore presentium mediante. Harum, quibus sigillum nostrum subappensum est, testimonio literarum. Datum Cracovie feria secunda proxima post sancti Stanislai in Majo Anno Domini millesimo quingentesimo septimo.*” Ibid. pp. 80–81. – Cf. Tardy L.: *Régi magyar követjárások Keleten*. (Early Hungarian diplomatic missions to the Orient), Budapest, 1971. p. 174.

⁴⁰ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1. c.

his name. The explanation lies in the highly important and widely recognized role the wandering Jewish physicians fulfilled as the interpreters of classical Greek and especially Arab medicine. The Arab traditions were preserved and the early medieval Arab medicine was propagated by the physicians who peregrinated, or often emigrated under the pressure of necessity, from Spain both to the West and to the East. It is enough to refer in this respect to the Toledo school of medicine, which spread over France, first of all to Montpellier and to Italy (mainly to Salerno). This process started in the 12th century and reached its climax at the turn of the 14th–15th centuries, when the Spanish-Jewish doctors played an outstanding role in spreading the teachings of Avicenna and Averroes in Europe, which had a decisive effect upon the development of medicine. Later this school found its way back to Asia – Minor and Central Asia – in a more developed and refined form, after the Arab school was improved and adapted in the medical schools of Montpellier and Salerno. Though we have no direct, written evidence of Isaac's role in this process, we may suppose, that he was an active participant of this trend. The very age itself and the conspicuously frequent emphasis on his medical profession and his function as court physician make this thesis feasible. Medical history knows several other cases which resemble his.

Isaac Israili (Isaac Judaeus) was the court physician of the Khalifa of North-Africa in the 10th century. His work „*Liber de urinis*”, (together with the commentaries of the better known *Constantinus Africanus*) was taught at the University of Vienna even in the 16th century.⁴¹ Today only the name of the mediator Constantinus Africanus is remembered, although it was due to the „*Liber de urinis*” of Isaac Israeli that the teachings of *Avicenna* penetrated into the literature of Europe. Several other works by him were commented upon by *Petrus Hispanus*, who became *Pope John XXI*.⁴² The connection between Isaac Israeli and the Canon of Avicenna was dealt with in the basic work of *H. Schipperges*.⁴³

Jewish physicians frequently appeared in the European centres of Arab medicine. One of its best representatives in Southern Europe was *Faraq ben Salin*, a Jewish physician from Girgenti, who was in the service of *Charles of Anjou* from 1279. Medical history remembers him chiefly as the translator and commentator of *Mesue* and *Rhazes*. The Arab original was brought from the ruler of Tunis by a special delegation of *Charles of Anjou*. Later these Latin translations were used in the East!⁴⁴

In connection with the role of the Jewish physicians, mention must be made of the pseudo-Aristotelean dietetics, which had a considerable influence on European medicine in the 14–15th centuries. This was allegedly of Greek origin, but in fact was the Latin translation of an 11th

⁴¹ Aschbach, J.: *Geschichte der Wiener Universität im ersten Jahrhundert ihres Bestehens*. Wien, 1865. p. 321.

⁴² De diaetis universalibus; De febris. – Cf. Erlanger, P.: *Isaac Judaeus*. Tübingen, 1922.

⁴³ *Die Assimilation der arabischen Medizin durch das lateinische Mittelalter*. Wiesbaden, 1964.

⁴⁴ Steinschneider, K.: Constantinus Africanus und seine arabischen Quellen. *Virchows Archiv* 37 (1866) p. 358.

century Arab compilation under the title „*Secretum Secretorum*”. Its Hebrew translation by *Rabbi Jehuda al Charizi* was translated back to Arab, and later once more into Latin.⁴⁵

By the light of these data it is more understandable how the wandering Jewish doctor, who was well versed both in European and Eastern medical practices and transmitted the achievements of Arab medicine, could find a place among the doctors of the King of Poland.

⁴⁵ Cf. Wüstenfeld, F.: *Die Übersetzungen arabischer Werke in das Lateinische seit dem XI. Jahrhundert.* (Abb. Gesch. Wiss., No. 22.) Göttingen, 1877. p. 82 ff.