

**“These were hard times for Skanderbeg,  
but he had an ally,  
the Hungarian Hunyadi”**

**Episodes in Albanian–Hungarian Historical Contacts**



Edited by  
**Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics**



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Hungarian Academy of Sciences  
Research Centre for the Humanities

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Research Centre for the Humanities,  
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Portraits of John Hunyadi and Skanderbeg in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Prizren (© Photo made by Jeton Jagxhiu)

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> (Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics) .....	7
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### Part I: Historical Contacts

Tamás Pálosfalvi <b>Skanderbeg and the Hunyadis: Myth and Reality</b> .....	15
Balázs Sudár <b>An Aristocratic Albanian Family that Gained a Foothold and Emerged in the Hungarian Borderlands: the Aranids</b> .....	23
Zoltán Péter Bagi <b>Giorgio Basta: A Short Summary of a Career</b> .....	35
Antal Molnár <b>The Catholic Missions and the Origins of Albanian Nation-Building at the Beginning of the 17th Century</b> .....	67
Eleonóra Géra <b>The Secret Life of the Albanian Priest Toma Raspassani in Buda</b> ....	93
Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics <b>Lajos Thallóczy and Albanian Historiography</b> .....	107
Tibor Balla <b>The Activities of the International “Scutari Detachment” in 1913–1914</b> .....	147
Ferenc Pollmann <b>Baron Ferenc Nopcsa’s Participation in the Albanian Military Campaign of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy in 1916</b> .....	167
Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics <b>The 25th Anniversary of Albanian Independence and the Hungarians (1937)</b> .....	187

Csaba Katona	
<b>Geraldine Apponyi, the Sold Bride</b> .....	<b>203</b>
Péter Kacziba	
<b>Albanian–Hungarian Relations During the Greek Civil War</b> <b>(1946–1949)</b> .....	<b>219</b>
László Márkus	
<b>Hungarian View on the Independence of Kosovo</b> .....	<b>231</b>
 <b>Part II: Academic links</b>	
Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics and Lumnije Jusufi	
<b>The Birth of the First Hungarian–Albanian Dictionary (1913)</b> .....	<b>257</b>
Zoltán Barina and Dániel Pifkó	
<b>Hungarian Botanists in Albania</b> .....	<b>275</b>
Miklós Takács and Péter Langó	
<b>Archaeologia Hungaroalbanica. Connections between</b> <b>Hungarian and Albanian Medieval Archaeology</b> .....	<b>305</b>
<b>Index</b> .....	<b>325</b>

## Giorgio Basta: A Short Summary of a Career<sup>1</sup>



Zoltán Péter Bagi

*“Also, that was the time when the Turkish sultan, Mehmet,<sup>2</sup> came to Nándorféhevár; he moved with his armies over the Danube, came to Eger, conquered it and seized the castle; to the aid of which Sigismund Báthory rushed with the Transylvanian army.<sup>3</sup> He came to the field of Keresztes, three miles from Eger and united with the army of the Holy Roman Emperor whose general was Maximilian, Prince of Austria;<sup>4</sup> and they challenged the forces of the Emperor, but Eger hath been spent and in the succeeding battle the Turks hath defeated the Christians.”<sup>5</sup>*

This is how Ferenc Hidvégi Mikó, confidant of Gábor Bethlen, Prince of Transylvania summarized the events of 1596 in the Hungarian theatre of war. The loss of Eger and the defeat at Mezőkeresztes (October 22–26, 1596) were just as grievous as the military failures suffered in 1594 (the failed siege of Esztergom and

1 The author received the Bolyai János Research Fellowship while working on this study (BO/00010/14/2).

2 Sultan Mehmed III (1595–1603).

3 Sigismund Báthory, prince of Transylvania (1588–1598, 1601–1603).

4 Archduke Maximilian Habsburg (1558–1618).

5 “Szintén ez idő tájékán szultán Mehemet török császár kijövé Nándor-Fejérvárhoz; általköltözvén a Dunán, Eger alá jöve, megszállá, megvevé, a kinek segítségére az erdélyi haddal kimene Báthory Zsigmond a Keresztes mezejére, ki három mérföld Egerhez, megegyezvén a római császár hadával, kinek generálisa Maximilián ausztriai herczeg; megvívának a császár erejével, de már Eger elkölt vala, a harcz is succedála, mert megverék a törökök a keresztényeket.” Kazinczy, Gábor. *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája. A maga életében történt erdélyi dolgokról, 1594–1613*. Pest: Akadémia, 1863. 137–304, 141.



the loss of Győr).<sup>6</sup> In order to turn the tide, Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Hungary (1576–1612), requested his brother, Archduke Ernest of Austria (1553–1595), to send him personnel eligible to serve both as high-ranking military officers and as members of the War Council. The emperor even provided the names of those he wished to welcome to the Kingdom of Hungary: Jean T'Serclaes de Tilly<sup>7</sup> (1559–1632) and a certain de la Motta. One day later he wrote another letter, this time without names.<sup>8</sup> The Habsburg Court in Prague finally found the perfect candidate: he was a scholar and an experienced and able soldier, Count Karl von Mansfeld (1546–1595), who could also be appointed to the rank of lieutenant colonel general.<sup>9</sup>

Besides Tilly, Mansfeld brought along two other soldiers who played significant roles in the history of the Fifteen Years' War (the Long Turkish War) in the Hungarian theatre of war: Adolf von Schwarzenberg (1551–1600)<sup>10</sup> and Hermann Christoph von Russworm (1565–1605).<sup>11</sup> During the negotiations in Brussels, the Count also proposed to put other individuals of considerable military expertise on the emperor's payroll, including Giorgio Basta. At the time, however, Rudolf II refused to employ him, because Alessandro Verlin, who was also participating in the negotiations, opined that since the Kingdom of Spain was preparing for war with Henry IV of France (1589–1610), it would be inexpedient to rob Philip II of Spain

6 Eger fell on October 13, 1596. The castle of Eger was strategically important, because whoever held it could control and defend the road connecting Buda and Transylvania. *Baranyai Decsi János magyar története (1592–1598)*. Translated by Péter Kulcsár. Budapest: Helikon, 1982. 325; Tóth, Sándor László. *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború*. Szeged: Belvedere Meridionale, 2000. 189; Kelenik, József. 'A mezőkeresztesi csata,' In *Fegyvert s vitézt... A magyar hadtörténet nagy csatái*, edited by Róbert Hermann. Budapest: Corvina, 2003. 111–129, 114.

7 Junkelmann, Marcus. "Der Du gelehrt hast meine Hände den Krieg." *Tilly. Heiliger oder Kriegsverbrecher?* Altötting: Geiselberger, 2007; Saller, Rudolf. *Reichsgraf Johann T'Serclaes von Tilly*. Altötting: Geiselberger, 2007.

8 Hatvani (Horváth), Mihály. *Magyar történelmi okmánytár a brüsseli országos levéltárból és a burgyundi könyvtárból. III. kötet (1553–1608)*. Pest: Eggenberger, 1859. 61.

9 *Istvánffy Miklós Magyarok dolgairól írt története. Tállyai Pál XVII. századi fordításában*. Published by Péter Benits. Reprint, Budapest: Balassi, 2009. 195; Bagi, Zoltán Péter. 'Karl von Mansfeld és a tizenöt éves háború.' In *Az oszmán–magyar kényszerű együttélés és hozzájárása*, edited by Zsuzsanna J. Újváry. Piliscsaba: PPKE BTK, 2013. 287–302.

10 Schwarzenberg, Karl. *Geschichte der reichsständischen Hauses Schwarzenberg*. Neustadt an der Aisch: Degener, 1963. 104–107; Pálffy Géza – Perger, Richard. 'A magyarországi török háborúk résztvevőinek síremléke Bécsben (16–17. század).' *Fons* 5, no. 2 (1998): 207–264, 245–246.

11 Janko, Wilhelm Edlen. 'Der k. k. Feldmarschall Christoph Hermann von Russworm. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntniss der Regierungsperiode, Cultur- und Sittengeschichte unter Kaiser Rudolph II.' *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* 10, no. 4 (1869): 30–53, 181–210; Stauffer, Albrecht. *Hermann Christoph Graf von Rusworm kaiserlicher Feldmarschall in den Türkenkämpfen unter Rudolf II*. München: Ackerman, 1884.



*Giorgio Basta (1550–1607) Engraving by Dominicus Custos in 1604 (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)*

(1556–1598) of the invaluable insight of these commanders.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Habsburg emperor offered no employment to Basta in that year.

However, the fiascos of 1596, especially the poor performance of the senior officers in the last phase of the Battle of Mezökerezsztos, prompted the emperor to once again request abler commanders from the Habsburg Netherlands.<sup>13</sup> A letter written by Rudolf II on February 15, 1597 in Prague reveals that Archduke Albrecht (1559–1621), governor of the Spanish provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands, called his relative's attention to several individuals, whereupon the Prague Court

12 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv (ÖStA KA) Alte Feldakten (AFA) 1595/4/ad3g.

13 Kelenik, 'A mezökerezsztosi csata', 127.

decided to choose Basta.<sup>14</sup> So started the Hungarian and Transylvanian career of Basta, one of the cruellest and most dreaded Habsburg senior officers in the history of Hungary.

### The major turning points in Giorgio Basta's life and career (1544–1607)

Giorgio Basta was born in a village called Ulpino in Monferrato Province in 1544.<sup>15</sup> His father, an Albanian nobleman named Demetrius Basta from the historical region of Epirus, had served the king of Spain. In 1542 he had been ordered to go to Piedmont with his *stratioti*<sup>16</sup> in order to fight with the army of the king of France. There he had met Magdolna Rosini, an aristocratic lady from Alessandria, and had married her. They had then had a son called Giorgio, who was raised in Asti until the age of 14, when he discontinued his studies as the king ordered Demetrius Basta to go to the Habsburg Netherlands. The son soon followed his father to his new post to learn the military profession.

Giorgio Basta steadily climbed the army's career ladder, as one might put it today. As he proudly stated in the preface of his own work, the *Gouuerno della Caualleria*, he started as a simple private.<sup>17</sup> He acquired his strategic skills in the war between the Spanish crown and the Provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands as well as in the French wars of religion as a supporter of the Catholic League. He fought under the command of such famous officers as Fernando Álvarez de Toledo y Pimentel, Duke of Alba (1507–1582), Don Juan d'Austria (1547–1578), Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma (1545–1592), and the already mentioned Karl von Mansfeld.

Basta's name first appears in the sources in July 1568; at the time he fought under the leadership of his father in the army sent to siege Bergen op Zoom. Following the death of Demetrius Basta (1571) he joined as deputy commander the company of *stratioti* led by his brother, Nicolo. He fought in the battles of Langenstraten (1572), Mook (1574) and Gembloux (1578), but also participated in the sieges of Antwerp (1576, 1584) and Hulst (1589, 1596) and in the attacks against Bonn (1588), Noyon (1593) and Calais (1596). In recognition of his merits the king of Spain promoted him to higher and higher ranks.

14 Hatvani, *Magyar történelmi okmánytár*, 86–87.

15 According to Schweigerd Basta was born on January 30, 1550, in the village of La Rocca close to Taranto. Schweigerd, Carl A. *Oesterreichs Helden und Heerführer von Maximilian bis auf die neueste Zeit*. Erster Band. Zweite Periode. Wien: Comptoire, 1857. 593–599, 593; Bălcescu writes that he had indeed been born in La Rocca, but in 1547 rather than in 1544. Bălcescu, Nicolae. *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején*. Translated by János V. András. Bukarest: Irodalmi Kiadó, 1963. 315.

16 On the *stratiota* light cavalry, see B. Szabó, János. *A honfoglalóktól a huszárokig. A középkori Magyar könnyűlovasságról*. Budapest: Argumentum, 2010. 139–140.

17 Basta, Giorgio. *Gouuerno della Caualleria, Das ist, Bericht von Anführung der leichten Pferde...* Frankfurt: de Bry, 1614.

In the late 1570s or early 1580s he was already the captain of a company of arquebusiers; later, he commanded a lancer unit. He was the commissary general of the cavalry of Karl von Mansfeld's army sent to siege Hulst in 1589. The following year Alessandro Farnese, who had invaded France, appointed him to lead a 500-strong light cavalry unit, whilst in 1592 he was promoted to the position of commander general of the Spanish cavalry, which was sent to the French theatre of war. It was with the aid of 800 cavalymen and through the surrounding moorland that he threw provisions into La Fère which had been besieged by Henry IV for four years. In reward, he obtained the title of baron from the king of Spain in 1596. Further, he was made the landlord of Sult in Flanders and the governor of the Gelderland in the Habsburg Netherlands.

Basta abandoned a promising career in the Habsburg Netherlands when, on April 29, 1597, he entered the service of Emperor Rudolf II as the lieutenant field marshal of the main imperial-royal army (*General Obrist-Feldmarschall-leutnant*).<sup>18</sup> In the same year he participated in military operations in Hungary.<sup>19</sup> At the onset of winter he travelled to Prague and in the new year he planned to return to his home in the Habsburg Netherlands. The emperor, however, wanted to retain his services, and, as a token of his confidence, he made Basta the Knight of the Golden Spur (February 16, 1598). Basta was also given the rank of General of the Light Cavalry (*General über die geringe Reiterei*). Basta accepted the new title and the rank, since in the previous year it was him who requested the emperor to grant him those.<sup>20</sup> The *Hofkriegsrat* even allowed him an escort of one hundred Walloon arquebusiers.<sup>21</sup> By the emperor's grace he could also make a three-month visit to his home in the Netherlands.

Upon his return to Vienna he found that in his absence the relations in the Court had changed considerably. The emperor had appointed Adolf von Schwarzenberg the field marshal<sup>22</sup> of the new campaign, under whose leadership, however, Basta refused to serve. Thus instead of becoming commander of the light cavalry he was

18 For more on this rank, see Bagi, Zoltán Péter. *A császári-királyi mezei hadsereg a tizenöt éves háborúban. Hadszervezet, érdekérvényesítés, reformkísérletek*. Budapest: Históriaantik, 2011. 65–73.

19 Dilich, Wilhelm. *Ungarische Chronica, darinnen ordentliche, eigentliche, kurtze beschreibungen des Ober und Nieder Ungern, beneben seinen Landtaffeln ...* Cassel: Wessel, 1606. 307–308; Hatvani, *Magyar történelmi okmánytár*, 88; Kazinczy, Gábor. *Illésházy István nádor följegyzései 1592–1603*. Pest: Akadémia, 1863. 49–50; Horváth, Mihály. *Magyarország történelme*. IV. kötet, Pest: Heckenast, 1871. 452; Benda, Kálmán. 'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése a magyarországi török háborúról 1594–1602.' *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 30, no. 4 (1983): 651–681, 663; Tóth, Sándor László. 'A vac-verőcei csata (1597. november 2–9.).' *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 102, no. 1 (1989): 14–42; Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború*, 265–283; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 233, 283–285.

20 ÖstA KA, Hofkriegsrat (HKR) Protokolle (Pr.) Registratur Band 199. Fol. 12v. No. 17.

21 ÖStA KA Bestallungen (Best.) No. 561.

22 ÖStA KA AFA, 1598/7/4.

appointed master of ordnance, responsible for the control and provisioning of the artillery units (*General Obrist-Zeugmeister*).<sup>23</sup> In August he received the post of field marshal of the army ordered to escort Archduke Maximilian, who was to take over as the governor of Transylvania.<sup>24</sup> This army was sent against the main Ottoman army led by Saturci Mehmed that besieged the castle of Várad in eastern Hungary (September 29–November 3, 1598).<sup>25</sup> On two occasions Basta attempted to provide resupply for the defenders of the castle to no avail. Finally, the Ottoman army failed to capture Várad and retreated undisturbed.<sup>26</sup>

In 1598 Basta's life and career became strongly intertwined with the fate of Upper Hungary and Transylvania, since the emperor appointed him acting commander in chief of Upper Hungary (*Verwalter des Feldoberstamtes in Oberungarn*).<sup>27</sup> The Transylvanian events of 1599 and Cardinal András Báthory's<sup>28</sup> seizing the throne resulted in a political constellation that proved to be rather unfavourable for the new Habsburg Court in Prague. Rudolf II therefore ordered Basta to cooperate with Michael the Brave, Voivode of Wallachia<sup>29</sup> (1593–1600), and to overthrow with a joint attack the power of the cardinal-prince who sought to make peace with both the High Porte and the Habsburg Court whilst maintaining strong ties in Poland.

However, no money or soldiers were provided to aid Basta, so he could not embark on any significant military enterprise. Consequently, on October 28, 1599 the Wallachian–Cossack–Székely army of Michael the Brave defeated András Báthory's forces at Sellenberk (Șelimbăr, present-day Romania) without Basta's help.<sup>30</sup> Upon receiving news of the battle, the sickly Basta set out for Transylvania

23 ÖStA KA HKR Pr. Expedit Band 200 Fol. 13r. No. 75.

24 ÖStA KA AFA, 1598/8/13; Kazinczy, *Illésházy István nádor följegyzései*, 56; Benda, 'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése', 666.

25 In May 1598, an army of 9,600 men was put together for Archduke Maximilian who had been appointed governor of Transylvania. Half of this army was made up of riders and infantry hired on the tax voted by the Silesian and Moravian estates. ÖStA KA AFA, 1598/5/ad 5.

26 Hatvani, *Magyar történelmi okmánytár*, 106–107; Benda, 'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése', 666; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 312, 317.

27 ÖStA KA AFA, 1599/9/2; Benda, 'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése', 667; Pálffy, Géza. 'Kerületi és végvidéki főkapitányok és főkapitány-helyettesek Magyarországon a 16–17. században.' *Történelmi Szemle* 39, no. 2 (1997): 257–288, 273.

28 On András Báthory's life, see Horn, Ildikó. *Báthory András*. Budapest: Új Mandátum, 2002.

29 Bălcescu, *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején*.

30 Meurer, Theodor. *Theodori Meurers relationis historicae continuatio, oder warhafftige Beschreibung aller fürnemen und gedenckwürdigen Historien. Wahrhaftige Beschreibung aller vornehmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien*. Franckfurt, M.: Latomus, 1600. 28; Hatvani, *Magyar történelmi okmánytár*, 135; Kövári, László. *Erdély történelme*. III. kötet, Pest–Kolozsvár: Ráth–Stein, 1860. 89–99; Kazinczy, *Illésházy István nádor följegyzései*, 75–78; Szilágyi, Sándor. *Erdélyország története tekintettel művelődésére*. II. kötet. Pest: Heckenast, 1866. 4–6; Szádeczky, Lajos. *Erdély és Mihály vajda története 1595–1601, Oklevéltárral*. Temesvár: Csanád-egyházmegyei Könyvsajtó, 1893. 54–112; Bălcescu, *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején*, 243–313; Szamosközy, István. *Erdély története* (1598–1599, 1603). Budapest: Európa, 1981. 218–275; Benda, Kálmán. *Bocskai István*. Budapest: Századvég, 1993. 80; Tóth,

where he was met with the suspicion of the Hungarian estates and with the jealousy of the Romanian voivode. In order to somewhat restrict the power of Michael the Brave, Basta left German and Hungarian garrisons in Huszt (Хуст, present-day Ukraine), Somlyó and Hadad (Hodod, present-day Romania), and then marched to Kassa (Košice, present-day Slovakia) in March 1600. On his way he wrote several reports on how the Romanian voivode had abused his power.<sup>31</sup> These reports – the news of the policy Michael the Brave pursued towards the High Porte and the Transylvanian nobility's requests for help – finally sufficed to convince the Prague Court that the Romanian voivode had to be eliminated.

In August 1600, Michael the Brave summoned his loyal Rascian, Wallachian, Cossack and Székely troops to the town of Szászsebes (Sebeş, present-day Romania). Basta, the captain general of Upper Hungary, set out in early September to Transylvania to aid those opposed to the voivode. On September 4 at Torda (Turda, present-day Romania), he joined forces with István Csáky, leader of the Transylvanian nobles' army, and four days later this army defeated the forces of Michael the Brave at the village of Miriszló (Mirăslău, present-day Romania).<sup>32</sup>

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*A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború, 388–399; Horn, Báthory András, 220, 228; Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája, 319; Bethlen, Farkas. Erdély története. V. kötet, Báthory Zsigmond lemondásától Mihály vajda hatalomra kerüléséig (IX–X. könyv.)* Translated by Péter Kasza. Notes by Tamás Kruppa. Budapest: Enciklopédia, 2010. 127, 138–139.

31 Meurer, *Theodori Meurers relationis historicae continuatio*, 59; Hatvani, *Magyar történelmi okmánytár, 140–144; Szilágyi, Erdélyország története, 13; Szamosközi István történelmi maradványai 1542–1608. IV. vegyes följegyzések.* Published by Sándor Szilágyi. Budapest: M. Tud. Akadémia Könyvkiadó-Hivatala, 1880. 111–112; Acsády, Ignác. *Magyarország három részre oszlásának története 1526–1608.* Budapest: Athenaeum, 1897. 550–552; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája, 323.*

32 Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB) Codex (Cod.) No. 8973, 530r-v; Dilich, *Ungarische Chronica*, 332; Miles, Matthias. *Siebenbüergischer Wuerg-Engel oder Chronicalischer Anhang des 16 Seculi nach Christi Geburt.* Hermannstadt: Fleischer, 1670. 257–258; Pethő, Gergely. *Rövid magyar kronica.* Cassán: Frauenheim, 1729. 149; 'Tractatus Rerum tam Bellicarum, quam etiam aliarum, ab anno 1599 usque 1606 inclusive in Transylvania interventarum, per Georgium Krauss, 1646 fungentem Civitatis Schaesburgensis Notariuirt. Conscriptus. 1599–1606.' In *Deutsche Fundgruben der Geschichte Siebenbürgens*, edited by Joseph Kemény G. Klausenburg: Tilsch, 1839. 161–217, 166; 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.' In *Erdélyi Történelmi Adatok*, edited by Imre Mikó. Kolozsvár: Ev. Ref. Főtanoda, 1855. 39–168, 54–56; 'Egyedi Pál énekéből az erdélyi veszedelmekről.' In *Erdélyi Történelmi Adatok*, edited by Imre Mikó. Kolozsvár: Ev. Ref. Főtanoda, 1855. 169–217, 182; 'Sepsi Laczkó Máté, Lórándffy Mihály udvari concionatora krónikája és emlékezésre méltó hazai dolgoknak rövid megjegyzései 1521–1624.' In *Erdélyi Történelmi Adatok*, edited by Imre Mikó. Kolozsvár: Ev. Ref. Főtanoda, 1857. 3–246, 38; Kővári, *Erdély történelme, 106–111; Kazinczy, Illésbázy István nádor följegyzései, 80; Kazinczy, Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája, 147; Szilágyi, Erdélyország története, 15–17; Horváth, Magyarország történelme 4, 472; Szamosközi István történelmi maradványai, 124–126; Szilágyi, Sándor. 'Gyulaffi Lestár történelmi maradványai [1143–1606] 1–2.' *Történelmi Tár* 16 (1893): 109–145, 193–231, 131, 226; Szádeczky, Lajos. 'A miriszlói ütközet, az erdélyiek, Basta és Mihály vajda között.' *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 6 (1893): 425–455; Szádeczky, *Erdély és Mihály vajda története, 113–203; Acsády, Magyarország három részre oszlásának története, 553–554; Veress, Endre. A miriszlói csata (1600. szeptember 18.).* Kolozsvár: Stief, 1907; Bălcescu, *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején, 314–404; Nagy, László. Bocskai István a hadak élén.* Budapest: Zrínyi, 1981. 75; Benda,*

The victory, however, failed to solve the problems in Transylvania for Basta and the Prague Court; on the contrary, it appeared to have created even more. The estates opposing the voivode were divided into three parties and their opinions were divided as to the next steps. The party led by Gáspár Kornis urged the acceptance of Habsburg rule and proposed Archduke Maximilian as the candidate for the throne. The supporters of Báthory led by Moses Székely (1553–1603) pressed for the free election of the prince and wanted to recall Sigismund Báthory. The third party, followers of István Csáky, sought an intermediary solution: they wished to remain loyal to Rudolf but demanded to be allowed to freely elect the prince. Basta's situation further worsened when he had no choice but to dismiss his troops whose wages he could not pay; therefore, the Transylvanian estates who feared retribution from Michael the Brave and from the Porte, found that the enthronement of Sigismund for the third time would be the most acceptable solution as Báthory also enjoyed the support of Poland. The general Diet of Transylvania convened in early 1601 in Kolozsvár (Cluj, present-day Romania) once again elected Sigismund Báthory as prince of Transylvania.<sup>33</sup> Basta, who was nominated the governor of Transylvania (*Gubernator in Siebenbürgen*) in the meantime, had no choice but to leave the country.<sup>34</sup>

Rudolf II refused to accept the loss of Transylvania. Upon hearing the news of Sigismund's enthronement, Rudolf decided that Michael the Brave, who had taken refuge in his Court, should once again enjoy his royal favour. What is more, he provided one hundred thousand Rhenish guilders for him to enlist soldiers and join Basta's forces. The emperor opined that Transylvania belonged to the Habsburgs while the Romanian voivode as a vassal could possess Wallachia.

In early July 1601, Voivode Michael and his eight thousand soldiers joined Basta's forces at Majtény (Majcichov, present-day Slovakia). On July 24 their army invaded Transylvania and, on August 3, 1601, defeated Sigismund's forces at Gorozsló (Guruslău, present-day Romania). After the victory Basta also settled accounts

'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése', 671; Újváry, Zsuzsanna. „Nagy két császár birodalmi között.” Budapest: Gondolat, 1984. 79–80; Benda, *Bocskai István*, 89; Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború*, 400–409; Ortelius, Hieronimus Augustinus. *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsempörungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn auch in Siebenbürgen von 1395*. Reprint, Győr: Pytheus, 2002. 190r.; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 324–348; Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 243–272.

<sup>33</sup> *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 127; Ortelius, *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsempörungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn*, 196v; Papp, Sándor. *Die Verleihungs-, Bekräftigungs- und Vertragsurkunden der Osmanen für Ungarn und Siebenbürgen, Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung*. Wien: ÖAW, 2003. 109–113; Kruppa, Tamás. *Erdély és a Szentszék a Báthoryak korában okmánytár II. (1595–1613)*. Budapest–Róma–Szeged: Szegedi Tudományegyetem, 2009. 88; Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 274–276.

<sup>34</sup> Pethő, *Rövid magyar kronica*, 149; 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.' 57–59; 'Egyedi Pál énekéből az erdélyi veszedelmekről.' 183–184; Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 18–20.

with Michael the Brave: on the pretext of treason and the plunder of his soldiers he ordered his Walloons to murder him in the encampment of Torda on August 19.<sup>35</sup>

As the governor of Transylvania, Basta once again strengthened the country's loyalty to the emperor, although Sigismund and his followers refused to relinquish control over Transylvania. The fallen prince returned in September 1601, and this time he was backed by the Porte. Supported by the rest of his faithful followers and aided by the Turkish and Tatar troops that were invading Transylvania, he attacked Basta who, lacking a sufficient army, withdrew to the Kingdom of Hungary.

By the end of the year a rather strange situation had arisen. Sigismund had occupied Gyulafehérvár (Alba Julia, present-day Romania) and the Saxon cities but had not managed to conquer the high walls of Kolozsvár. On the other hand, Basta had gained a foothold in Northern Transylvania and had occupied one castle after the other: Gyalu, Nagymás, Bethlennvár and Beszterce all fell (Gilău, Almaşu Mare, Beclean, Bistriţa; present-day Romania).<sup>36</sup> On February 15, 1602, the two parties agreed to an armistice based on the status quo. During the negotiations Basta supported Radu Şerban (1601, 1602–1610), pretender of Wallachia, and gave him troops to occupy the province. In March 1602, however, the enterprise fell through. Since Basta did not have enough money or soldiers to continue the fight, through the mediation of István Csáky he forced Sigismund Báthory to leave via diplomatic means.

The supporters of Báthory led by Moses Székely refused to accept that Prince Báthory had relinquished the throne and that Transylvania was lost to the Habsburgs. Basta was forced to engage them in battle at Tövis (Teiuş, present-day Romania) on July 2, 1602. Following his victory in the battle, Basta could take possession of Transylvania.

35 Dilich, *Ungarische Chronica*, 333–334; Pethő, *Rövid magyar kronica*, 150; Krauss, 'Tractatus Rerum tam Bellicarum', 168–171; 'Virtus Coronata oder Ursach, und Lohn Expeditionis Schirmerianae Beschreibts Zur Ehr, Exempel, und Gedächtnuss unserer lieben Teutschen Nachkommenschafft Thomas Bordan Pfarrer zu Stolzenburg. 1601–1603.' In *Deutsche Fundgruben der Geschichte Siebenbürgens*, edited by Joseph Kemény G. Klausenburg: Tilsch, 1839. 219–250, 224; Hatvani, *Magyar történelmi okmánytár*, 154; 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memóriáléja.' 59–61; 'Egyedi Pál énekéből az erdélyi veszedelmekről.' 185; 'Sepsi Laczkó Máté', 38–39; Kövári, *Erdély történelme*, 113–122; Kazinczy, *Illésbázy István nádor följegyzései*, 81–94; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferencz históriája*, 149–151; Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 21–23; Horváth, *Magyarország történelme* 4, 475; *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 132–136; Szádeczky, *Erdély és Mihály vajda története*, 218–266; Szilágyi, 'Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai', 132; Acsády, *Magyarország három részre osztlásának története*, 555–558; Benda, 'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése', 672–673; Újváry, 'Nagy két császár birodalmi között', 80; Benda, *Bocskai István*, 90–98; Ortelius, *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsempörungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn*, 199v–200r.; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 350–355; Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentszék*, 90–93.

36 Krauss, 'Tractatus Rerum tam Bellicarum', 179–180; 'Egyedi Pál énekéből az erdélyi veszedelmekről.' 186–187; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferencz históriája*, 152–153; Benda, 'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése', 675–676; *Magyar História 1526–1608*, edited by Gábor Nagy. Debrecen: Tóth, 1998. 355–357; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 389–390.



Besides securing the country for the Habsburgs, he attempted again to seize Wallachia and this time he succeeded: Radu Șerban was enthroned in August 1602.<sup>37</sup>

As captain general of Transylvania Basta was further pestered by Moses Székely and the dissatisfied estates of the country. While he was conducting negotiations with the latter, Székely received permission (*abdname*) from the Sultan to seize the throne.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, in the spring of 1603, the High Porte ordered a rather large Turkish–Tatar army led by Bektash, Beylerbey of Temesvár (Timișoara, present-day Romania), to aid the meagre forces of Székely.

The campaign that started in early April proved to be fruitful: Lugos (Lugoj, present-day Romania), Karánsebes (Caransebeș, present-day Romania) and Gyulafehérvár, where Székely had himself elected prince of Transylvania, fell in quick succession. Basta was once again doomed to helplessly watch the advance of the Transylvanian–Turkish–Tatar army, because he had too few soldiers. He could not expect help from either Prague or Radu; therefore, he and his retinue escaped to the Kingdom of Hungary. Székely was left alone and by mid-summer he had gained control over the entire country.

Although Radu feared that the voivode of Moldavia would launch an attack against him, in early July his forces marched out of Wallachia and defeated the army of Prince Moses and Bektash at Brassó (Brașov, present-day Romania) on July 17, 1603. After the victory, Basta took possession of Transylvania in the name of the emperor for the third time. For this act he received the castle of Huszt and the title of lord-lieutenant of Máramaros county (Maramureș, present-day Romania) from Rudolf II. (Basta had held the title of Count of Huszt from April 1602.)<sup>39</sup>

Having worn down the resistance of the estates, Basta could start to organize the Habsburg-style administration of Transylvania. At the Diet that opened at Déva

37 Dilich, *Ungarische Chronica*, 341–342; Krauss, ‘Tractatus Rerum tam Bellicarum’, 181–182; Bordan, ‘Virtus Coronata’, 225–233; Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.’ 62–68; ‘Egyedi Pál énekéből az erdélyi veszedelmekről.’ 188–210; ‘Sepsi Laczkó Máté’, 40; Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 123–133; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája*, 154–155; Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 25–32; Horváth, *Magyarország történelme* 4, 477–479; Szamosközi István történeti maradványai, 137–172; Gömör, Gusztáv. ‘Adalékok az 1601–1602. évi erdélyi hadi eseményekhez.’ *Haditörténeti Közlemények* 10 (1897): 59–84, 235–257; Acsády, *Magyarország három részre oszlásának története*, 559; Bojti Veres, Gáspár. ‘A nagy Bethlen Gábor viselt dolgairól.’ In *Bethlen Gábor emlékezete*, edited by László Makkai. Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1980. 36–136, 28; Újváry, ‘Nagy két császár birodalmi között,’ 81; Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború*, 410–417; Ortelius, *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsempörungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn*, 213r–223r.; Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája, 389–394, 405; Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentszék*, 93–111, passim.

38 ‘Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.’ 78–83; Papp, Sándor. ‘Székely Mózes erdélyi fejedelem hatalomra kerülésének diplomáciai tanulságai és egy nagyvezíri előterjesztés (telhis) keletkezése.’ *Aetas* 14, no. 4 (1999): 71–88; Papp, *Die Verleihungs-, Bekräftigungs- und Vertragsurkunden der Osmanen*, 113–117.

39 Fallenbüchl, Zoltán. *Magyarország főispánjai / Die Obergespane Ungarns 1526–1848*. Budapest: Argumentum, 1994. 85.

(Deva, present-day Romania) on September 9, 1603, Basta suspended the feudal constitution of Transylvania. He made all the participants adopt a decree which stipulated that the entire fortune of those absent from the Diet and of those who fell on the side of Székely in the Battle of Brassó was to be confiscated. The noblemen who were present were pardoned if they paid one quarter of their fortune in cash money to the emperor. The disloyal cities had to reconvert to Catholicism, and they had to pay remarkably high tributes to the emperor.

Basta ensured the systematic implementation of the retributory decrees adopted at the Diet of Déva. He retained the title of governor but was aided by a Governing Council of 10. Five of the members came from abroad; the other five were Transylvanians loyal to the Habsburgs. The Council executed the orders of the Prague Court. Basta nominated strangers to exercise control over the castles, towns, counties and the seats and started to persecute the Protestants. The Diet no longer fulfilled its previous functions; at the Kolozsvár assembly (January 25, 1604) the participants were only required to vote in favour of the new taxes. The towns that had been pronounced disloyal, lost their right to self-administration and had to pay considerable fines to the emperor: Brassó was liable to make a payment of 50,000 and Kolozsvár a payment of 70,000 Rhenish guilders. The country, however, lost more than its independence and self-rule: four Transylvanian counties in the northwest were annexed to the Kingdom of Hungary and came under the military and political control of Giorgio Basta.<sup>40</sup>

The emperor appointed Governor Basta as field marshal of the main imperial-royal army in April 1604<sup>41</sup> and as lieutenant colonel general (*General Obristleutnant*) for Matthias, Archduke of Austria. In these capacities, Basta successfully defended the castle of Esztergom against the army of Grand Vizier Lala Mehmed from September 18, 1604 to October 12, 1604.<sup>42</sup> In the final months of the year, however,

40 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.' 84–91; Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 152–158; Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 42–46; Acsády, *Magyarország három részre oszlásának története*, 561–564; Szamosközy, *Erdély története*, 458–477; Szilágyi, 'Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai', 223; Veress, Endre. *Basta György hadvezér 1603-iki főjelentése és erdélyi kancelláriájának formula-könyve*. Budapest: Athenaeum, 1914; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 409–410.

41 Pethő, *Rövid magyar kronica*, 157; 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.' 94; Horváth, *Magyarország történelme* 4, 491; Horváth, Mihály. *Magyarország történelme*. V. kötet. Pest: Heckenast, 1872. 7; Acsády, *Magyarország három részre oszlásának története*, 534; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája*, 27; Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború*, 424–426; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 423.

42 'Tagebuch der Feldzüge des Regiments des Obristen Georg Freyherrn Ehrenreich. Besonders beim Gran und Eperies von 27. Julii 1604 bis 26. Octobris 1606 ausgeführt.' In *Sammlung kleiner, noch ungedruckter Stücke, in welchen gleichzeitige Schriftsteller einzelne Abschnitte der ungarische Geschichte aufgezeichnet haben*, edited by Martin Georg Kovachich. Erster Band. Ofen: Universitäts-Druckerey, 1805. 288–445, passim; *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 256.

he did not fight the Ottoman army, but turned against the Hajduks of Bocskai in an attempt to crush the uprising that had broken out in October against Rudolf II.

Basta defeated Bocskai's forces at Osgyán (Ožďany, present-day Slovakia) on November 17, 1604 and at Edelény (November 25–28, 1604). Due to his small army and complete lack of artillery, he failed to occupy Kassa (December 3–5, 1604)<sup>43</sup> and then retreated to the army's winter quarters in the Eperjes (Prešov, present-day Slovakia) area.<sup>44</sup> With his infantry regiments and the cavalry he left Szepes county (Spiš, present-day Slovakia) in April 1605 and concentrated his troops at Pozsony (Bratislava, present-day Slovakia) in the fortifications prepared for Vienna's defence.<sup>45</sup>

Even though Basta received further decorations, the aging and sickly commander was no longer reckoned with at the Court. Even his Walloon cavalry were taken away from him and were disbanded.<sup>46</sup> Basta wished to overcome his financial difficulties by accepting a commission of the Holy See, since Pope Paul V wanted Basta in his army. On February 26, 1607, the parties signed the contract, and Rudolf II also agreed to release Basta from his service when Venice made peace with the Papal states, as Basta's services would no longer be required. The physically and morally shaken Basta suffered a fatal stroke on November 20, 1607.<sup>47</sup>

43 Pethő, *Rövid magyar kronica*, 162–163; 'Sepsi Laczkó Máté', 54–55; Horváth, *Magyarország történelme* 5, 9–10; *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 264; Szilágyi, 'Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai', 204–205; Nagy, László. *A Bocskai szabadságharc katonai története*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1961. 107–153; Bojtj Veres, 'A nagy Bethlen Gábor viselt dolgairól', 49–50; Nagy, László. "Megint fölszánt magyar világ van..." *Társadalom és hadsereg a XVII. század első felének Habsburg-ellenes küzdelmeiben*. Budapest: Zrínyi, 1985. 17–222, passim; Benda, *Bocskai István*, 129–130; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 438–442.

44 Szilágyi, 'Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai', 195; *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 267, 309, 340; Nagy, *A Bocskai szabadságharc*, 204–224; Hain, Gáspár, ed. *Szepességi avagy löcsei krónika és évkönyv kedves utókor számára összeállította Hain Gáspár*. Budapest: Magvető, 1988. 128–130; H. Német, István. *Várospolitikai és gazdaságpolitika a 16–17. századi Magyarországon*. 1–2. kötet. Budapest: Gondolat, 2004; Oláh, Tamás. 'A Bocskai-felkelés forrásai Zemplén Levéltárában.' In *Levéltári Évkönyv XIV*, edited by Mariann G. Jakó et al. Miskolc: Borsodi Nyomda, 2006. 60–78, 64–65; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 444–445.

45 Pethő, *Rövid magyar kronica*, 164–170; 'Sepsi Laczkó Máté', 55–56; *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 342–343; Nagy, *A Bocskai szabadságharc*, 276–302; Kovács, József László. *Faut Márk és Klein Menyhért krónikája 1526–1616. Sopron város történeti forrásai*. C/1. kötet. Sopron–Eisenstadt: Medieninhaber, 1995. 138; Dominkovits, Péter. "Egy nemzetek lévén..." *A Nyugat-Dunántúl Bocskai István 1605. évi hadjárata idején*. Budapest: Martin Opitz, 2006. 12–160, passim; *Lackner Kristófnak, mindkét jog doktorának rövid életrajza. Sopron város történeti forrásai*. C/5. kötet. Translation, notes, preface and indices by Gergely Tóth. Sopron: Győr–Moson–Sopron Megye Soproni Levéltára, 2008. 107–109, 156–157; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 453, 459.

46 In August 1602 Basta was commissioned to take on 1,000 Walloon harquebusiers: ÖStA KA Best. No. 721; Kelenik, József. 'A kézi lőfegyverek jelentősége a hadügyi forradalom kibontakozásában. A császári-királyi hadsereg fegyverzetének jellege Magyarországon a tizenöt éves háború éveiben.' *Haditörténelmi Közlemények* 104, no. 3 (1991): 80–122, 105.

## Basta, the commander

In his book *The Mask of Command*, English historian John Keegan listed five duties that commanders were to consider and perform if they wished to successfully prepare and conduct their campaigns.<sup>48</sup> We will analyse Giorgio Basta's skills and activity as a commander through two of Keegan's aspects, the imperative of action and the imperative of example.

### Action based on knowledge and forethought

In his letter of October 4, 1604, Giovanni Stefano Ferreri, the papal nuncio in Prague, wrote to Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini that it was in Basta's nature to never risk the success of his enterprises and the lives of his soldiers.<sup>49</sup> In another contemporary work Gáspár Vojti Veres commended the acts of Gábor Bethlen and remarked that in the Battle of Edelény, Bethlen as captain of the vanguard had fought with "*Commander Giorgio Basta, who was cunning rather than belligerent*".<sup>50</sup> In my opinion these two descriptions are the briefest and most concise summary of Basta's expertise and military skills. Ferreri's letter reveals Basta's cautiousness and foresight and highlights that he sought to execute all his tasks in a manner that allowed him to spare the lives of his few soldiers.

The military art of the era held that the best defence against the greater numbers and larger cavalry of the enemy was to build ramparts and trenches. Basta fought in the Netherlands and in France and was therefore familiar with these new tactical approaches, as shown by the following excerpt from Miklós Istvánffy's work on the Battle of Vác–Verőce (November 2–9, 1597).

47 Kepner, Johann Friedrich. *Thaten und Charakterzüge berühmter österreichischer Feldherren*. Erster Band, erste Abtheilung. Wien: Degen, 1808. 118–122; Schweigerd, *Oesterreichs Helden und Heerführer*, 593–599; Veress, Endre. *Basta György levelezése és iratai I. (1597–1602)*. Budapest: MTA Könyvkiadó Hivatala, 1909; Veress, Endre. *Basta György levelezése és iratai II. (1602–1607)*. Budapest: MTA Könyvkiadó Hivatala, 1913; Pálffy–Perger, 'A magyarországi török háborúk résztvevőinek síremléke Bécsben', 213–215.

48 Keegan, John. *A parancsnoklás álarca*. Budapest: Európa, 2011. passim. [Translator's note: The English language version used for the purpose of translation: Keegan, John. *The Mask of Command*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.]

49 'Die Prager Nuntiatur des Giovanni Stefano Ferreri und die Wiener Nuntiatur des Giacomo Serra (1603–1605)'. In *Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland siebzehntes Jahrhundert*, edited by Arnold Oskar Meyer. Berlin: Bath, 1913. 234; Veress, *Basta György levelezése II*, XXIV.

50 "*Basta Györggyel, az inkább fortélyos, semmint harcias vezérrel.*" Bojti Veres, 'A nagy Bethlen Gábor viselt dolgairól', 49–50.

*“And Maximilian also deemed it would happen beyond doubt and thus ceased to surround the encampment with ramparts, trenches and carriages from all sides and, taking heed of Giorgio Basta, he had four fortifications erected on the higher ground to defend the encampment and filled those with artillery and German, Italian, French and Magyar infantry; following the example of Count Karl Mansfeld who also erected such fortifications at suitable locations and by that he had gained victory when occupying the castle of Esztergom.”<sup>51</sup>*

Basta later also made use of ramparts and fortifications when he deemed them necessary. He applied this principle before the Battle of Mirisló when, fearing the swift attacks of Voivode Mihály’s Cossacks, he had ramparts erected and placed part of his infantry and artillery within them.<sup>52</sup> In a similar fashion, he ordered his soldiers to erect a strong rampart at Dés (Dej, present-day Romania) when he was outnumbered by Sigismund Báthory’s army invading Transylvania in the autumn of 1601. He left sufficient forces to defend the rampart and he retreated toward Szatmár.<sup>53</sup> Mikó Hidvégi mentioned in his memoirs after the Battle of Brassó that Basta and his army marched to Lippa (Lipova, present-day Romania) where the commander had such strong ramparts erected that the Ottomans had no chance to break through.<sup>54</sup> In the Hungarian theatre of war he erected ramparts to actively defend Esztergom,<sup>55</sup> which proved very useful for the defenders of the castle.<sup>56</sup> Basta also had earthworks erected at Eperjes and Pozsony to protect the town and the fortification against Bocskai’s Hajduks.<sup>57</sup>

Not only did the commander make wide use of these defence structures, but he also advised others to erect such fortifications. We know from Illésházy’s notes that in 1602 Basta “reasoned with Voivode Radul not to engage in battle with the Tatars, as they, together with the Poles and Moldavians were a hundred thousand strong, but

51 “S Maximilián is kétség nélkül azt következni ítélvén, az táborn sánccal s árokkal és szekerekkel mindenfelől környülfogni megszűnék, és Basta György intéséből négy kastélyt az magosabb hegyecskéken az tábor oltalmazására csináltatni, s lövészerszámokat beléjük vonyartván megerősítetté, s német, olasz, francia s magyar gyalogokat helyhezveteti beléjük; hasznos példát vévén gróf Mansfeld Károlytól, kitől emlékeznek vala, hogy olyan kastélyok illendő helyeken való csinálásával Esztergom megszállásakor győzedelmet nyert légyen.” *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 283–284; Kazinczy, *Illésházy István nádor följegyzései*, 49–50.

52 Bălcescu, *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején*, 385; Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 259.

53 ‘Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.’ 62; Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 123; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája*, 153; Szamosközi *István történeti maradványai*, 137; Ortelius, *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsempörungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn*, 213r.; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 391.

54 Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája*, 24.

55 Dilich, *Ungarische Chronica*, 371.

56 *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 256.

57 Pethő, *Rövid magyar kronica*, 165; *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 309; Szilágyi, ‘Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai’, 202.

*advised him to erect ramparts and hide in the Transylvanian mountains.*<sup>58</sup> Basta's letter written in Prázsmár (Prejmer, present-day Romania) on September 30, 1602 to Filippo Spinelli, papal nuncio in Prague, reveals the outcome of his plan. The letter says that Basta sent Tommaso Cavrioli and 500 Walloon riders to aid the voivode of Wallachia. Cavrioli was ordered to stay behind the ramparts. Thanks to the efforts of the captains Count Carlo de Verlin and Count Camilio Cavrioli, the battle, which lasted until sunset, was won. Simion Movilă and the Crimean Tatar Khan lost 4–5,000 soldiers, while the Walloons and the Wallachians lost 300 soldiers with 1,000 injured.<sup>59</sup>

Basta proved the cunningness mentioned by Bojti Veres (adaptability might be a better choice of word) on three occasions against three different adversaries. The first occasion was the Battle of Miriszló, when he lured Voivode Michael out of his easily defendable position. Prior to the battle the Transylvanian troops defeated a small Cossack unit and the victory boosted their morale so that István Csáky, János Mikola and some other noblemen implored General Basta to allow them to attack Michael the Brave's army behind the ramparts. According to Szamosközy, Basta replied in the negative as follows:

*"...as I see the position of the Voivode has been greatly fortified and we would pay a high price should we want to storm his ramparts. Also, it is past the best time, as it is getting late. The Voivode is cunning so we must be cunning, too ... Either the Voivode will retreat during the night or he will oppose and attack us come tomorrow. We now should stay put and tomorrow we shall be victorious."*<sup>60</sup>

Basta's advice was taken and the battle was fought the following day. The commander, seeing that Michael the Brave had not abandoned his fortifications, ordered Csáky to retreat and lure the voivode out of the gorge where he had set up camp. Csáky had to attack him once the voivode ventured out.<sup>61</sup> The battle ended with the complete annihilation of the voivode's forces, just as Basta had predicted based on his insights.

58 "Végezte Radul vajdával, hogy meg ne vjjon az tatárokkal, mert ezek mind lengyelek-, moldvaival voltak száz ezeren, hanem hogy besáncolja magát az erdélyi havasokhoz." Kazinczy, *Illésházy István nádor följegyzései*, 111.

59 Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentszék*, 116–117.

60 "...a vajda az mint az helynek állapotját látom erős helyen vagyon, nagy kárunkkal vehetjük ki onnat. Más az hogy immár el is múlt az ideje, estve felé vagyon. Az vajda igen czigán, azért mi is ravaszak legyünk... Az vajda az éjjel vagy elmegyen előttünk, vagy szembe jű holnap velünk és reánk jű. Legyünk vesztegsigben, holnap jobb módunk lesz az dologban." *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 124–125; Veress, *A miriszlói csata*, 10–11.

61 *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 125; Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 259–262; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 347–348.

In less than a year's time the former adversaries became allies and the former allies became adversaries facing one another on the hills near Goroszló. Moses Székely, one of the leaders of Sigismund Báthory's army, occupied one of the hills and with his cannons kept the forces led by Basta and Michael the Brave under fire. The early August heat caused the parties to postpone the battle until the next morning and Székely's soldiers started to pull back their cannons from the ramparts on the hilltop and transport them back to the camp. The voivode and Basta saw the opportunity and launched an unexpected attack. They stood their soldiers in battle formations with the best units sent to occupy the hilltop under Basta's direction.

*“However, Moses left nothing back in what was a sudden and doubtful enterprise; and first the infantry with their rifles retook the hilltop and with their guns they waited with bravery for our soldiers, who stormed them. And they fought hard for a long time and many soldiers lost their lives on both sides.”<sup>62</sup>*

The unrelenting attacks of the imperial-royal troops were finally successful and Báthory's army suffered defeat.<sup>63</sup> Considering Basta's situation awareness and his ability to respond quickly to unexpected opportunities, it is understandable why Ferenc Mikó Hidvégi opined that Basta defeated Székely and Csáky not by sheer force; he outsmarted them.<sup>64</sup>

The third occasion took place on November 27, 1604 when Basta's army was surrounded by Bocskai's Hajduks near Edelény, in a narrow valley of the Bükk mountains. Máté Sepsi Laczkó recorded that it was once again Basta's situation awareness and military expertise that allowed him to escape from the trap.<sup>65</sup> The incessant counterattacks of his troops initially failed, but Basta could buy time and could identify the weaknesses of Hajduk infantry and cavalry regiments. The next dawn Basta took advantage of these weaknesses, broke out of the valley and defeated Bocskai's army.<sup>66</sup>

62 “Mindazonáltal Mózes semmit hátra nem hagyván abban, ami oly hirtelen és kétséges dologban véghezvitethetnék, elsőben az puskás gyalogok, kik a dombot a lövészerszámokkal ismét elfoglalták vala, a mieinket, kik rájuk rohanának, nagy merészen rájuk várak, és sokáig erősen harcolnak, sokan mind a két félben elveszvéen.” *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 353.

63 Szádeczky, *Erdély és Mihály vajda története*, 253–254.

64 Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája*, 151.

65 ‘Sepsi Laczkó Máté’, 54.

66 *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 442; Nagy, *A Bocskai szabadságharc*, 132–134.

## Personal example

Giorgio Basta strove to employ not only his knowledge and expertise in his battles and campaigns but like other commanders of the era he also personally participated in the fight, showing his soldiers a personal example of bravery.

In the Battle of Miriszló he was the leader of the rearguard when the Transylvanian and the imperial-royal army retreated, and he lured Voivode Michael out of his fortified position. Later, when the battle began, he set up his company of Walloon harquebusiers in front of the battle formation.<sup>67</sup>

He also risked his life in the Battle of Goroszló. In a contemporary account of the battle, Istvánffy recorded that Basta personally led his troops into battle up the hill that the Transylvanians had fortified with ramparts. He was shot in the shoulder but his armor deflected the bullet.<sup>68</sup>

In the Battle of Tövis on July 2, 1604 he may have been wounded. László Kővári wrote that in the battle “*János Kadácsfalvi inflicted two wounds on the general’s head.*”<sup>69</sup> However, a report by Lestár Gyulaffi casts doubt on the incident. He mentions that before the battle the general disguised a certain Zamo Jacobus as himself by clothing the man in his attire. Therefore, it was the substitute who was injured twice on the head and once in the shoulder. Allegedly it was Zamo himself who gave an account of the event to a certain István Szoross.<sup>70</sup>

Basta was willing to risk his life not only when attacking the enemy but on other occasions as well. Prior to the Battle of Miriszló, for example, he held the war council on horseback in the line of cannon fire.<sup>71</sup> In the Battle of Tövis, a huge cannonball hit the ground beside him,<sup>72</sup> and during the Siege of Kassa (December 1–3, 1604) he was almost smashed to death by a projectile aimed at his tent.<sup>73</sup>

It is also important to note that Basta shared the lot of his soldiers away from the battlefield, as demonstrated by the autobiography of Kristóf Lackner. The author mentions that when they launched an attack against Gergely Némethy in June 1605, the general spent the night in a carriage standing in the garden of the castle of Keresztúr.<sup>74</sup> At the time Basta was aged over 50 and was rather sickly.<sup>75</sup>

67 ÖStA KA Best. 565/1598; Szádeczky, *Erdély és Mihály vajda története*, 195, 199; Szádeczky, ‘A miriszlói ütközet’, 439; Veress, *A miriszlói csata*, 11; Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 262.

68 *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 353; Szádeczky, *Erdély és Mihály vajda története*, 254; Gömör, ‘Adalékok az 1601–1602. évi erdélyi hadi eseményekhez’, 82.

69 “*Kadácsfalvi Jánostól fejére két sebet kapott.*” Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 133.

70 Szilágyi, ‘Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai’, 199.

71 Bálcescu, *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején*, 389.

72 Gömör, ‘Adalékok az 1601–1602. évi erdélyi hadi eseményekhez’, 255.

73 *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 264; Szilágyi, ‘Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai’, 205.

74 Tóth, *Lackner Kristófnak, mindkét jog doktorának rövid életrajza*, 107.

75 Veress, *Basta György levelezése I*, XXXIV; Veress, *Basta György levelezése II*, XXI; Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentcsék*, 113.



## Basta, the military scientist

Giorgio Basta made use of his vast knowledge not solely on the battlefield; he considered it important to record and publish his experiences. He wrote in Italian, but in the early 17th century his works were published in French and German as well. His books counted as the most important sources of military education in the era.

He consigned three tractates to posterity, the most important of which is the *Il governo della cavalleria leggera*, or *The Government of Light Cavalry*<sup>76</sup> published in Venice in 1612. Two years later the book was published in Frankfurt in German and a French translation was issued in Rouen in 1616.

As for his views on the role of cavalry, Basta was clearly ahead of his time. It is essential to understand that the emergence and proliferation of firearms brought about a decisive transformation in tactics for both the infantry and the cavalry. The vigorous attack of the medieval knights made way for new tactics where the cavalry approached enemy lines at a gallop, and the riders fired their pistols or arquebuses in a stationary position. Then the cavalry retreated behind the infantry lines in order to reload their weapons. This manoeuvre was called *caracole*.<sup>77</sup> This caused the cavalry to move awkwardly on the battlefield and to lose other advantages, too.

Based on his own experience, the general strongly believed that the cavalry had to retain its mobility. The goal was to make the cavalry the eye of the army, that is, they had to be capable of successful reconnaissance. Their tactic was to wear the enemy out by constant attacks and assaults and by cutting off supply routes. Basta also emphasized that the cavalry had to be in contact and in sync with all other military branches. Therefore, it is not surprising that during the Long Turkish War commanders attempted to make up for the imperial-royal army's slowness and lack of mobility by engaging the services of Hungarian, Croatian, Polish and Cossack riders.<sup>78</sup>

The work consists of four major chapters. The first one discusses the recruitment of officers and common soldiers. Basta believed that it was their aptitude and experience that made a good officer rather than nobility titles. A captain tasked with setting up a unit was to have absolute authority over all other officers, but he had to discuss his choices with the commissioner or with the representatives thereof. (In that era, most high-ranking officers were also military contractors.) A lieutenant, in Basta's view, had to be of mature age, because this would guarantee his authority

76 In the 16th century all cavalry units were considered "light", unless they were covered in armour from head to toe.

77 Kelenik, 'A kézi lőfegyverek jelentősége', 80–122. passim.

78 Nagy, "Megint fölszánt magyar világ van..." 209; Szamosközi István történeti maradványai, 271; Szilágyi, 'Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai', 193.

over the subordinates. The standard bearers needed to be young people with an adventurous spirit and a desire for glory.

Basta devoted particular care to the armament of soldiers. The mounted shooters had a blunderbuss they fixed to their backs using a shoulder strap and they also carried a short sword suitable for piercing the enemy. Basta recommended that these cavalymen be young and robust, and he considered the Flemish and Walloons to be the best rather than the Italians. The most important characteristics for lancers were velocity and endurance. They also had to be equipped with a short sword and a pistol, which was useful in close-quarters combat.

The second chapter deals with how the army is to march to the battlefield. His experience gained in the Netherlands and France and the principles of the prince of Alba aided Basta in this chapter where he emphasized the importance of reconnaissance as a way of defending the army against the surprise attacks of the enemy.

The third chapter lays down the rules of billeting, although Basta stresses that he only reiterates the principles set out by Alessandro Farnese, pursuant to which a commander is to appoint commissioners whose task is to find and inspect the lodgings or quarters for the soldiers. These officers were also responsible for storing and distributing the supplies and provisions and were to be assisted by the *Furiers*.

The final chapter is devoted to the tactical organization of the cavalry on the battlefield. Basta recommends the crescent moon, rather than lines, columns or groups, because this arrangement allows the maximum utilization of firepower and of the momentum of the attack.<sup>79</sup>

Another important work written by Basta is the *Il maestro di campo generale*, that is *The General Field Marshal*. It was first published in Venice in 1606, and a year later a French translation was issued in Frankfurt. Then, in Oppenheim in 1617, it was published in German. Basta divided his work into six parts of various length. The first one consists of two chapters and deals with the personality of a general field marshal, who, according to Basta, must meet two most important requirements: he must fear God and he must be well-versed in the art of war. In Basta's view, the second-in-command (following the colonel general) does not need a deputy.

Basta identified two entities the general field marshal had to control. First, the field marshal had to control himself because only in this way could his leadership be without transgressions and greed, and only in this way could he set an example for his soldiers. Secondly, the general field marshal had to command and control an entire

79 Basta, *Gouverno della Caualleria*. On the illustrations in the book, see Noe, Alfred. 'Das Kavalleriehandbuch von Giorgio Basta d'Hust. Ein illustrativer Umweg in der Rezeption eines Fachtextes zu Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts.' In *Die Bedeutung der Rezeptionsliteratur für Bildung und Kultur der Frühen Neuzeit (1400–1750)*, edited by Alfred Noe and Hans-Gert Roloff. Bern–Wien: Peter Lang, 2012. 27–45.

army. Based on his experiences in Hungary and the Netherlands, Basta had in mind a multinational army, where all the nations were to retain their own characteristics and officers. Therefore, he argued, the general marshal had to know the customs, characteristics and language of his soldiers so that he did not need to engage the services of an interpreter. Basta thought this was indispensable and necessary because of the distribution of provisions. He discussed in a separate chapter how to procure and transport provisions into the camp and how to set the prices thereof in order to prevent financial speculations.

As for military justice, a general field marshal had rights and powers similar to those of a colonel general, although a general field marshal had to communicate to his superior any sentence he imposed before it was executed. Also, he had an important role in settling disputes between the common soldiers and their officers.

In the second part of the book Basta treats the third factor a general field marshal needs to keep under his control, that is, the duties related to the campaigns. It is imperative for a general field marshal to plan out the entire campaign and to make arrangements for the necessary armament and provisions. Furthermore, he must acquire information about the country and customs of the enemy and the features of their warfare. Basta analyses, in nine chapters, the different ways of marching, the tasks of the vanguard, the movement of the baggage train and the organization of a retreat.

The third part deals with the billeting of the army. In eleven short chapters, Basta sets out how to set up encampments and prepare the defensive ramparts. He also presents the principles according to which the general field marshal, in collaboration with the quartermaster (*Quartiermeister*), appoints the quarters for the infantry and the cavalry.

The fourth part is about sieges. Basta determines what needs to be taken into consideration before besieging a fortress. A general field marshal must be aware of the strength of the hostile field forces that may relieve the besieged castle; he must be familiar with the general state of the castle (strength of the walls, the number, provisions and armament of the defenders). A general field marshal must assess the benefit his commissioner may gain by occupying the castle; he must decide whether or not the sacrifice of provisions and soldiers' lives will be in vain. Further, Basta emphasizes that it is important for a general field marshal to send spies into the besieged castle who can inform him of the situation within the walls. Four chapters discuss the building of ramparts, trenches and artillery batteries and the protection of the builders.

The fifth part focuses on the various types of attack. This part consists of five chapters listing all the factors necessary for a general field marshal to order an attack. These chapters also cover the necessary weapons and equipment. Basta emphasizes

the importance of the shovel and the hoe, since these tools allowed the soldiers to erect new ramparts on the newly occupied territories. The general gained first-hand experience of the usefulness of these tools when Alessandro Farnese laid siege to Maastricht in 1579.

In the final part of his work Basta gives an overview about how to fight battles. He argues that a general field marshal must decide whether to seize or turn down the opportunity offered by the enemy to engage in battle. A general must consider whether to deploy the cavalry, especially if they are outnumbered by the enemy cavalry. It is equally important to pay attention to the enemy's battle formations and the position of the baggage train of the general field marshal's own army.

Five out of the nine chapters of the final part deal with how to fight Ottoman forces. Basta advises against engaging them in the open field and believes that the order of battle should be established by mixing infantry and cavalry units because this is the only way for an army to withstand the attack of an Ottoman cavalry that seem to outnumber any other equestrian forces.<sup>80</sup>

In 1610, three years after Basta's death, his third work – *Del governo dell'artiglieria*, or *The Government of Artillery* – was published in Venice. This book, however, was generally considered less significant and made a smaller impact on the art of warfare.<sup>81</sup>

### **Basta, the politician**

Carl von Clausewitz said that war is the continuation of politics by different means.<sup>82</sup> It appears that Basta was keenly aware of this axiom at the turn of the 17th century, and his biography reveals that he was much more than a talented commander. He received more complicated and delicate tasks from the Habsburg Court and in order to successfully complete those, Basta needed the skills of both a diplomat and a governor. Before briefly introducing Basta in these two roles, I would like to highlight three basic and connecting cornerstones of his policy. The first was his fierce loyalty to the emperor. The second was his determined effort to spare and keep the strength of his army by evasive manoeuvres if outnumbered or outpowered and by maintaining operational readiness through securing sufficient provisions and armament. Basta's pragmatic thinking was the third cornerstone; it often meant making promises to those on the enemy side in order to sow dissension among them.

80 Basta, Giorgio. *Il maestro di campo generale*. Oppenheim: Hoffmann, 1617.

81 Grassi, Giuseppe. *Dizionario militare Italiano*. Torino: V. Pomba, 1817. XXIII; D'Ayala, Mariano. *Dizionario militare Francese Italiano*. Napoli: Tip. G. Nobile, 1841. 13; D'Ayala, Mariano. *Bibliografia militare – Italiana antica e moderna*. Torino: Dalla stamperia reale, 1854. 137.

82 Keegan, *A parancsnoklás álarca*, 20. [Keegan, *The Mask of Command*, 4.]

## Basta, the diplomat

According to John Keegan, a general may be many things besides the commander of an army, for he may be a king, priest or diplomat.<sup>83</sup> Only a few months after his arrival in the Kingdom of Hungary, the general was given a diplomatic task: in 1597 he participated in peace talks with Serdar Saturji Mohammed. To date I have found no information as to whether Basta was an active participant or merely an observer in the negotiations. However, it seems certain that it was his good relationship with Archduke Maximilian and his high rank in the army rather than his local knowledge that allowed him to participate in the talks.<sup>84</sup>

After Maximilian's departure he had to play an active and independent political role in Upper Hungary and in Transylvania. As Niccolo Machiavelli puts it in *The Prince*, "It is necessary to understand how to set a good colour upon this disposition, and to be able to fain and dissemble throughly."<sup>85</sup> Basta's many years of experience prompted him to act in a similar fashion. In the summer and autumn of 1599, he considered it too risky to launch a campaign against Transylvania due to financial hardships and the proximity of Ottoman forces. Although Basta was aware of the intentions of Rudolf II, he sought to come to an agreement with András Báthory and treated his envoys with respect.<sup>86</sup>

One year later, after the Battle of Miriszló, Basta established diplomatic relations with Lord Grand-Chancellor Jan Zamoyski, since he did not have an army strong enough to defend and keep the newly acquired Transylvania and Wallachia for Rudolf II. The Polish grand-chancellor sought to enforce the terms of the agreement concluded with the High Porte in 1598, and wanted to take possession of Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>87</sup> That was why Sigismund Báthory wanted to seize the throne of Transylvania with the aid of Poland in January 1600.<sup>88</sup> Besides, Zamoyski planned to punish Michael the Brave for having interfered with the affairs of Moldavia, which was traditionally regarded as part of the Polish sphere of interest.

Zamoyski ordered Jan Potocki, Viovode of Braclaw, to seek out Michael the Brave wherever he might be and annihilate his army.<sup>89</sup> After their first exchange of

83 Keegan, *A parancsnoklás álarca*, 12. [Keegan, *The Mask of Command*, 1.]

84 *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 285.

85 "Fontos, hogy a fejedelem leplezni tudja valódi természetét, hogy tökéletesen értsen a tettetéshez és az alakoskodáshoz." Machiavelli, Niccolo. *A fejedelem*. Budapest: Kossuth, 1991. 74. [Translator's note: The English language version used for the purpose of translation: Machiavelli, Nicholas, *The Art of War & The Prince*, London: David Nutt, 1905. 322.]

86 Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 127; Bălcescu, *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején*, 246; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 319.

87 Horn, *Báthory András*, 199.

88 ÖNB Cod. No. 8973. 16r, 19r.

89 Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 269.

letters, Basta and the representatives of the Transylvanian estates decided to send István Csáky to Wallachia to negotiate with Zamoyski and Sigismund Báthory. They had to beg and make considerable promises to Csáky. Only after Basta offered him the castles of Sáros and Szádvár as a reward on behalf of the emperor, did Csáky agree to undertake the mission. Finally, he persuaded Zamoyski and Sigismund Báthory to refrain from invading Transylvania with their army.<sup>90</sup>

However, his success in fending off Polish aspirations proved to be temporary: at the Diet of Kolozsvár in the spring of 1601, as a result of Csáky's clandestine operations, the representatives of the estates elected Sigismund Báthory their prince. Although Basta defeated their army at Boroszló, he had no money or soldiers to recapture Transylvania. The parties declared a ceasefire preserving the status quo, but Sigismund was inclined to surrender Transylvania, so the Habsburg Court ordered Basta, who had retreated to Szatmár county, to start negotiations with the prince. During the talks, Basta espoused the cause of Radu Șerban, the Wallachian pretender.<sup>91</sup>

Basta once again approached Csáky and promised to pay him 80,000 Forints if Csáky could persuade the Prince to renounce the throne. The venal lord made Báthory relinquish his principality, and this unexpected move sparked outrage among his supporters who took up arms to fight Basta and his invading forces. The general promised they would be granted mercy by the emperor in an attempt to dissuade these noblemen from armed conflict, but his efforts were to no avail. After the bloody Battle of Tövis, Sigismund and the majority of his surviving followers pledged allegiance to Rudolf II, while Moses Székely, leader of the resistance, fled to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>92</sup>

When, however, Basta felt his forces were sufficient to win a battle, he always refused to settle the conflict through negotiation. The night before the Battle of Miriszló Michael the Brave sent his envoy to the encampment of Basta and the Transylvanians and in his letter, he begged them to peacefully resolve their conflict

90 Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 272–273; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 340–341; Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentszék*, 93–94.

91 Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 30–31; Veress, *Basta György levelezése II*, 8–10; Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború*, 419.

92 Dilich, *Ungarische Chronica*, 341–342; Krauss, 'Tractatus Rerum tam Bellicarum', 181–182; Bor-dan, 'Virtus Coronata', 225–233; 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriaálja.' 62–68; 'Egyedi Pál énekéből az erdélyi veszedelmekről.' 188–210; 'Sepsi Laczkó Máté', 40; Kövári, *Erdély történelme*, 123–133; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája*, 154–155; Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 25–32; Horváth, *Magyarország történelme 4*, 477–479; *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 137–172; Gömör, 'Adalékok az 1601–1602. évi erdélyi hadi eseményekhez', 243; Acsády, *Magyarország három részre oszlásának története*, 559; Veress, *Basta György levelezése I*, XLIII–XLV, 666–721; Bojti Veres, 'A nagy Bethlen Gábor viselt dolgairól', 28; Újváry, 'Nagy két császár birodalmi között', 81; Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború*, 416–417; Ortelius, *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegspömpungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn*, 213r–223r.; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 389–394, 405; Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentszék*, 93–111, passim.

and launch a joint attack against Temesvár. The envoy's request, however, failed to affect Basta and his follower noblemen, because they "*were all too familiar with the smooth talking and double tongue of the Voivode.*"<sup>93</sup>

Basta had to acquire the supplies necessary to keep the army operational. In order to maintain the strength and combat readiness of his army, Basta always made sure to provide the soldiers with all necessary supplies – which he seized either through negotiation or by sheer force. For instance, in December 1604 he was forced to enter into negotiations with the leaders of Eperjes, a free royal town that had come to support Bocskai. Following the battles of Osgyán and Edelény and the unsuccessful Siege of Kassa, he chose to stay with his soldiers and made a demand for winter quarters and supplies in Eperjes. The magistracy of Eperjes refused to comply. However, the imperial-royal army

*"set up camp on the outskirts of the town for three days, waiting for further notice. In the meantime, Eperjes reported the events to the other four free royal cities;<sup>94</sup> therefore their representatives congregated and discussed how they could prevent trouble and further damage to the cities. They loyally negotiated with the honourable lords and concluded that Lord Basta should promise on behalf of His Majesty to let them follow their Lutheran faith and to guarantee their liberties and not to provoke hostilities. To the proposition of the cities Lord Basta took an oath on the blood of Christ to keep his promises. When he had made his promise, he was allowed to enter the city of Eperjes, and his entire army was stationed in the houses of the noblemen and in the surrounding villages."<sup>95</sup>*

It is important to note that the leaders of the city made a pragmatic decision, since Basta's two victories significantly changed the war situation. Thus, the leaders considered that it was safer to side with Rudolf II, although they imposed certain conditions.

93 "Jól ismerték a már a vajda sima beszédét és kétszínűségét." Bethlen, *Erdély története*, 260; Szádeczky, *Erdély és Mihály vajda története*, 195; Bălcescu, *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején*, 386.

94 The towns of the Pentapolitana: Kassa, Lőcse, Bártfa, Kisszeben and Eperjes (Košice, Levoča, Bardejov, Sabinov, Prešov; present-day Slovakia).

95 "Három napig a külvárosban táborozott, további értesülésre várva. Közben Eperjes jelentést tett a másik négy szabad városnak, és ezért gyűlést tartottak, s azon tanakodtak, hogy előzhetnék meg a bajt s a szegény városok szegény károsodását. Hűségesen megtanácskozták előkelő urakkal, s arra jutottak, hogy Basta úr ő királyi felsége nevében ígérje meg ezeknek a városoknak, hogy meghagyja őket ágostai [evangélikus] hitükben, és szabadságaikat biztosítja, s nem szít ellenségeskedést. A városoknak arra a javaslatára Basta úr esküvel megfogadta nekik, hogy mindezt Krisztus vérére megtartja. Erre a nyilatkozatra beengedték Eperjes városába, az egész tábor pedig beszállsoltta magát a nemesi udvarokba és a falvakba." Hain, *Szepességi avagy lőcsei krónika*, 128–129.

### Basta, the governor

When Basta arrived in the Kingdom of Hungary, he was experienced not only in military affairs but also in the matters of governance, since the king of Spain had appointed him the governor of Geldern province in the Low Countries. Basta therefore was aware of how to govern an area in a time of war while ensuring the best possible provisions for his army.<sup>96</sup>

Following the defeat of András Báthory, the Hungarian landlords of Transylvania urged Rudolf II in the autumn of 1600 to appoint a respectable person as the governor of Transylvania. They also warned the emperor to hurry, since Voivode Michael the Brave had already assumed the title of governor and regent and donated lands on his own in Transylvania, convened the Diet and striven to occupy castles in eastern Hungary. What is more he had made the estates of Transylvania swear allegiance not only to Rudolf II, but also to himself and to his own son.

The Court then consulted Basta and requested his advice on how to settle the Transylvanian affairs. The general set out the rights and obligations of the future governor. He believed that the governor and the twelve counsellors aiding him had to swear allegiance to Rudolf II, and the governor was to issue a promissory note that he would not establish contact with the Ottoman Empire, nor would he fight as an ally of the Ottomans. As a token of recognizing the authority of the emperor, the governor had to pay tax to the Habsburgs and had to offer the major part of his revenue to construct and equip castles all over the country. All the patents given to the Transylvanian Saxons and cities were to remain valid. The fortresses in Partium under the control of Transylvania were to remain in the hands of the emperor, who also retained control over financial matters and mines.<sup>97</sup>

Basta could put his ideas into practice after the Battle of Miriszló. At the Diet of Lécfalva (Leț, present-day Romania) (October 25–November 4, 1600) two leaders were appointed to the newly established Governing Council: István Csáky represented the estates of Transylvania, while Basta acted on behalf of the emperor. The estates of Transylvania clearly understood that this transitory period was not sustainable in the long run, so they sent envoys to Prague and appealed to Rudolf II for the appointment of a Habsburg archduke (Maximilian) as the head of state. Alternatively, they requested the right to freely elect a prince. When neither of these requests were granted, Basta's political capital rapidly diminished.

The general abandoned the Machiavellian principles and instead of resorting to sheer brutality,<sup>98</sup> he made political gestures to win the favour of the Transylvanian estates. In spite of the emperor's disapproval, Basta, for example, dismissed his

96 Veress, *Basta György levelezése I*, XXXI.

97 Szádeczky, *Erdély és Mihály vajda története*, 110–112.

98 Machiavelli, *A fejedelem*, 70.



soldiers.<sup>99</sup> This measure, however, further complicated his position, because the estates in Transylvania believed that Sigismund Báthory and his supporter, Jan Zamoyski, would grant them the protection against the return of Voivode Michael or another Ottoman attack. Still, over time, Basta appeared in a more favourable light and in February 1601, at the Diet of Kolozsvár, the participants offered him the castle of Déva if he promised to stay in Transylvania and to come over to Báthory's side. Basta, however, honoured his oath of allegiance to the Habsburgs and turned down the offer.<sup>100</sup> In the aftermath of the Battle of Tövis, Basta once again chose not to govern the country in the Machiavellian fashion. He made political gestures to win the loyalty of the Transylvanian estates for the Habsburgs,<sup>101</sup> but later he decided to abandon this policy and in 1603 he switched to violent methods.

Although the Transylvanians pledged loyalty to Rudolf II at the Diet of January 19, 1603, the pillaging of the Habsburg soldiers and the famine that arose following a poor harvest deepened the abyss between Basta and the estates of Transylvania. The representatives of the estates sent a letter to Rudolf II with their administrative and legal demands. Basta responded by practically suspending the feudal constitution. On February 24, 1603 he and two of his fellow commissioners drafted a proposition on how to govern Transylvania. They addressed the document to Rudolf II and proposed to introduce a new administration by appointing a governor and an eight-member Lieutenant Council; the liberties of the counties, towns and other self-governing units were to be abolished; the Diet was to be eliminated and the Governors Grand Council were to function as the legislative body. The authors also proposed to set up a permanent Chancellery and invite German settlers, craftsmen and miners to Transylvania.<sup>102</sup>

After Voivode Radu's victory at Brassó, Basta remained the governor for another nine months, during which time he had many high-ranking officials of the public administration executed and terrorized the Transylvanian estates. Having broken down the resistance, Basta set out to organize the Habsburg administration of Transylvania.<sup>103</sup>

99 Kálmán Benda in his work on Bocskai writes that Basta had already suspended the constitution of the country and he governed more ruthlessly than Voivode Michael, because he considered the Hungarians to be his enemies. Benda, *Bocskai István*, 90–91.

100 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.' 59; Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 116; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferencz históriája*, 150; Gömör, 'Adalékok az 1601–1602. évi erdélyi hadi eseményekhez', 68; *Erdélyt és Magyarországot érintő iratok 1601–1605. Jezsuita Okmánytár I/1–2*, edited by Mihály Balázs et al. Szeged: JATE, 1995. 18–21; Ortelius, *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegerpörrungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn*, 196v; Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentszék*, 88.

101 Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 135; Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 31; Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentszék*, 113.

102 Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 33–34; Veress, *Basta György hadvezér 1603-iki főjelentése*.

103 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memoriáléja.' 84–91; Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 152–158; Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 42–46; Acsády, *Magyarország három részre oszlásának története*,

When discussing Basta's *modus operandi* as governor, one may not ignore the assassination of Michael the Brave, voivode of Wallachia. Based on what he had experienced in the Habsburg Netherlands, Basta regarded political murder as a conventional method to resolve political impasses. One such instance was when Balthasar Gérard, a fanatic Catholic shot William I, Prince of Orange, on July 10, 1584 in Delft. After the assassination, Basta was a member of the squad sent to apprehend the perpetrator in October 1584.

Basta therefore believed that political murder was a way to resolve conflicts in the intricate Transylvanian affairs, and in the Prague Court of the Habsburgs he also raised the possibility of assassinating István Bocskai, too. The emperor did not object to the idea, but then decided not to follow through, since Bocskai was famous for being cautious.<sup>104</sup> What necessitated the assassination of Michael the Brave was that the voivode had been a turncoat and his ambitions posed a real threat to the Habsburg rule in Transylvania. In his case Basta made no effort to keep up pretence: he simply sent his Walloons into the tent of the victim and then had his severed head carried around in the Torda encampment.<sup>105</sup>

### Perception of Giorgio Basta in Hungarian historiography

If there was a contest to identify the most hated figures of Hungarian history, Basta would certainly be among the finalists. As László Kővári put it in his work published in 1860, "*it has been two and a half centuries since the events, but the name of Basta and the era in which he ruled still evoke bloodcurdling memories in our soul.*"<sup>106</sup> Basta's

561–564; Szamosközy, *Erdély története*, 458–477; Szilágyi, 'Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai', 223; Veress, *Basta György hadvezér 1603-iki fjjelentése; Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 409–410; Kruppa, Tamás. 'Miksa főherceg erdélyi kormányzóságának terve. Az erdélyi Habsburg-kormányzat felállításának kérdéséhez.' *Századok* 145, no. 4 (2011): 817–846, 838.

104 Benda, *Bocskai István*, 93–94; G. Etényi, Nóra et al. *Koronás fejedelem, Bocskai István és kora*. Budapest: General Press, 2006. 148.

105 Dilich, *Ungarische Chronica*, 333–334; Pethő, *Rövid magyar kronica*, 150; Krauss, 'Tractatus Rerum tam Bellicarum', 168–171; Bordan, 'Virtus Coronata', 224; Hatvani, *Magyar történelmi okmánytár*, 154; 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz emlérialéja.' 59–61; 'Egyedi Pál énekéből az erdélyi veszedelmekről.' 185; 'Sepsi Laczkó Máté', 38–39; Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 113–122; Kazinczy, *Illésbázy István nádor följegyzései*, 81–94; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája*, 149–151; Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 21–23; Horváth, *Magyarország történelme* 4, 475; Szamosközi *István történeti maradványai*, 132–136; Szádeczky, *Erdély és Mihály vajda története*, 218–266; Szilágyi, 'Gyulaffi Lestár történeti maradványai', 132; Ac nádó, *Magyarország három részre oszlásának története*, 555–558; Benda, 'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése', 672–673; Újváry, "Nagy két császár birodalmi között", 80; Benda, *Bocskai István*, 90–98; Ortelius, *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsempörungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn*, 199v–200r.; *Istvánffy Magyarok dolgairól írt históriája*, 350–355; Kruppa, *Erdély és a Szentszék*, 90–93.

106 "Harmadfél százada az eseményeknek, mégis a Basta név s a Bastakor fogalma, vérfagyaláló emlékezetet kelt lelkiünkben." Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 120.

contemporary historiographers and historians in later periods considered Basta's actions harmful for two main reasons. Firstly, they blamed him for allowing the Walloons and the Hungarian Hajduks to raid and pillage the country that had turned into a theatre of war. Secondly, he was held responsible for the havoc stemming from poor harvests, the destruction of productive forces (as clearly indicated by the concept of 'Basta's carriage'<sup>107</sup>), the rising of food prices, and, ultimately, cannibalism.

István Szamosközy identified eight events or series of events that led to the ultimate devastation of Transylvania beginning from the victory of Voivode Michael the Brave at Sellenberk to the defeat of Moses Székely. In four of the accounts the author referred to the plundering of Basta's Hajduks.<sup>108</sup> However, Szamosközy did not mention the atrocities that had taken place after the surrender of Beszterce, even though Istvánffy, Dilich, Ortelius and Isolano and several Transylvanian historiographers recorded those terrible deeds in their works or memoirs.<sup>109</sup>

Owing to the atrocities described in the above-mentioned sources, Hungarian positivist historiographers formulated a rather negative opinion about Basta. Kővári wrote that Basta's ferocious personality was accompanied by an equally ferocious appearance;<sup>110</sup> to execute the outrages, he brought an army of fierce Walloons who hated all Protestants.

*"But six thousand Walloons were not sufficient; domestic Walloons were also in need, so, as Basta used to say, they could have one breed of dogs tear at the other."<sup>111</sup>*

As Mihály Horváth puts it, "He [i.e. Basta], and his army were evil in their ways, turning their fury mainly on those supporting Sigismund Báthory and his cause."<sup>112</sup>

At the end of the 19th century Gusztáv Gömöry, the most productive military historian of the era, referred to reports published in the *Fuggerzeitung* and noted that Basta also resorted to violence when keeping his own soldiers in line. He severely

107 Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 32, 45; Benda, *Bocskai István*, 101.

108 Szamosközy István történeti maradványai, 101–103.

109 Dilich, *Ungarische Chronica*, 340; Krauss, 'Tractatus Rerum tam Bellicarum', 179–180; 'Maros-vásárhelyi Nagy Szabó Ferencz memóriáléja.' 66; 'Egyedi Pál énekéből az erdélyi veszedelmekről.' 186–187; Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 142; Kazinczy, *Hidvégi Mikó Ferenc históriája*, 153; Szamosközy István történeti maradványai, 140, 163; Benda, 'Giovanni Marco Isolano gróf ezredes feljegyzése', 676; Nagy, *Magyar História*, 355–357; Ortelius, *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsempörungen und Belagerungen in Ungarn*, 216r–217r; Istvánffy *Magyarok dolgainról írt históriája*, 389–390.

110 Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 120; Bălcescu, *A románok Vitéz Mihály idején*, 315–316.

111 "Azonban hatezer vallon nem volt elég, belföldi vallonokat is kelle teremteni, hogy mint Basta is mondani szokta vala, az ebet ebbel marassák." Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 120.

112 "Mind hadai gonoszul gazdálkodának, kivált azok ellen fordítván dühüket, a kik Báthory Zsigmond pártjára álltak vala." Horváth, *Magyarország történelme* 4, 477.

punished his soldiers when they were caught robbing from locals near Beszterce. He had nine Walloons and one soldier from Pezzen's regiment decapitated, and another Walloon, who had attempted to shoot him, quartered. Also, several other ruffians were caught, whom Basta ordered to be decapitated or hanged. On one occasion, 30 naked women were recovered in his soldiers' barracks, who were all freed. One Fähnrich of the above-mentioned regiment was found to be in possession of 6,000 thalers worth of goods. The goods were returned to their owner and then the officer was executed.<sup>113</sup>

Hungarian historiographers blamed Basta for violating the rights of the Transylvanian estates. As János Keserői Dajka puts it in his work praising Gábor Bethlen,

*“after many ordeals, and after Giorgio Basta subjugated Transylvania and imposed unspeakable tyranny, he devoted all his powers to eradicate our and the homeland's liberties and then he initiated a gruesome religious persecution.”*<sup>114</sup>

In his work on the history of Transylvania, Kővári likened Basta to Roman Emperor Nero because of the events at the Diet of Medgyes (Mediaș, present-day Romania).<sup>115</sup> In his work published a few years later, Sándor Szilágyi wrote that the governance of Basta was *“both heartless and helpless, tyrannical and cowardly at the same time.”*<sup>116</sup> Mihály Horváth did not spare the negative attributes when describing the period of Basta's governance: *“After this, Transylvania suffered even more bitterly from the tyrannical despotism of this ruthless man.”*<sup>117</sup>

Henrik Marczali, in his historiography of Transylvania published in 1935, called Basta a tiger, emphasizing his bloodthirsty nature and referring to the actions of his soldiers or to Basta's political activity.<sup>118</sup> Kálmán Benda did the same in his monograph written about István Bocskai.<sup>119</sup>

These works reprimanding Basta and his deeds were followed by other interpretations in the first half of the 20th century that applied rational rather than

113 Gömöry, 'Adalékok az 1601–1602. évi erdélyi hadi eseményekhez', 252; *Szamosközi István történeti maradványai*, 141.

114 “Sok csapás után, miután Basta György Erdélyt leigázva mérhetetlen zsarnokságot gyakorolt, s a haza és a mi szabadságunkat teljes erejével ki akarta irtani, majd borzalmas vallásüldözést rendezett.” *A fejedelem: 1613–1629. Keserői Dajka János ... írásaiból*. Bevezette Makkai, László. Budapest: Franklin, 1942. 14.

115 Kővári, *Erdély történelme*, 153.

116 “Szívtelen és tehetetlen volt egyszerre, zsarnoki és gyáva ugyanazon időben.” Szilágyi, *Erdély-ország története*, 44.

117 “A kegyetlen ember zsarnok kényét ezentúl még keservebben sinylette Erdély.” Horváth, *Magyarország történelme* 4, 479.

118 Marczali, Henrik. *Erdély története*. Budapest: Káldor, 1935. 100.

119 Benda, *Bocskai István*, 100–103.

emotional approaches in their efforts to shed light on the general's personality. Endre Veress compiled Basta's biography with commendable impartiality in the introduction of his two-volume diplomatic history. He neither glorifies Basta nor compares him to Nero. Like Gömör, Veress also points out that Basta strove to control his soldiers and punished them if they failed to obey him. Veress argues that what transpired at the 1603 Diet of Medgyes was also not the result of personal vengeance; what is more, he successfully proves with sources published in his work that the general carried out the secret orders of the Court.<sup>120</sup>

Gyula Szekfű, who was beyond doubt the most eminent Hungarian historian in the first half of the 20th century, also provides an objective representation of Basta and discards the tenet according to which Basta was a genuinely evil person who hated all Hungarians. Szekfű believes that it was the Habsburg archdukes who transformed Basta's goodwill towards the Hungarians into antipathy.<sup>121</sup>

László Nagy ventured even further in the 1980s by actually arguing in favour of Basta. It would be unjust, says Nagy, to make the general primarily and personally responsible for the truly grave conditions in Transylvania.<sup>122</sup> He dismissed the long-standing idea that Basta had not only refused to crack down on the atrocities committed by his soldiers but instead encouraged those in order to "*break the resistance of the Hungarian nobility against Habsburg rule.*"<sup>123</sup> Nagy, who is a military historian, pointed out that had Basta allowed his soldiers to raid and pillage the villages, he would have risked losing the supply or provisions of his army and his own capability of maintaining discipline. He relies on Ferenc Szabó Nagy's memoirs and on the documents collected by Veress in order to prove his claims. He also mentions that in order to protect the country's wealth, Basta attempted on more than one occasion to remove his Hajduks and Walloons from Transylvania.<sup>124</sup>

László Nagy also poses the question whether the Principality of Transylvania or the Kingdom of Hungary made bigger sacrifices in the Long Turkish War? He thinks that the Transylvanians who had had no chance to get accustomed to warfare "*felt that their sacrifice was graver, harder to bear and therefore they were more resentful than people living in the Kingdom of Hungary.*"<sup>125</sup> Zsuzsanna Újváry shared similar sentiments in her work published in 1984. Further, she emphasized that considering

120 Veress, *Basta György levelezése I-II*; Tóth, *A mezőkeresztési csata és a tizenöt éves háború*, 425.

121 Szekfű, Gyula. *Magyar történet*. IV. kötet. Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1928. 360.

122 Nagy, László. 'Erdély és a tizenöt éves háború.' *Századok* 116, no. 4 (1982): 639–688, 673.

123 "Ezzel akarván megtörni a magyar nemességnek a Habsburg-kormányzattal szembeni ellenállását." Nagy, László. *Hajdúvitézek*. Budapest: Kossuth, 1986. 147.

124 Nagy, *Hajdúvitézek*, 147–148.

125 "Súlyosabbnak érezték, nehezebben viselték el és jobban sérelmezték azokat, mint a magyarországiak." Nagy, 'Erdély és a tizenöt éves háború.' 673–674.

its size, Transylvania had far too big an army to feed and this factor inflicted more damage on the Principality than on the larger and richer Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>126</sup>

A book by Ildikó Horn, Nóra G. Etényi and Péter Szabó on István Bocskai examined Basta's actions from a new perspective and offered a new explanation. According to the authors "*Basta ran amok in Transylvania not only because of his cruel nature but also out of financial considerations.*"<sup>127</sup> The treasury could not pay his soldiers, and therefore he spent 80,000 gold coins from his private fortune to cover the expenses of the Transylvanian actions. Consequently, the emperor donated the castle of Huszt and the surrounding estates to him. In order to keep his property, Basta had to rule Transylvania. That is, by invading Transylvania again and again, the general merely protected his own investment and wanted to retrieve his money by blackmailing noblemen and plundering the towns.

## Conclusion

At the turn of the 17th century, Giorgio Basta was one of the best soldiers in the Hungarian and Transylvanian theatres in the Long Turkish War against the Ottoman Empire. Basta built his career from the bottom up and studiously wrote down his experiences. His works were published posthumously and became the most authoritative manuals on military science in the 17th century.

Yet, Basta has been remembered in history as a ruthless and brutal governor of Transylvania. This image will most probably remain unchanged until his life and career are analysed from new angles that allow a more nuanced and detailed interpretation of Basta's personality and achievements in a European context.

126 Újváry, "*Nagy két császár birodalmi között*", 86.

127 "A generális erdélyi ámokfutását nem pusztán kegyetlen természete, hanem anyagi megfontolások is vezették." G. Etényi et al., *Koronás fejedelem*, 156.

