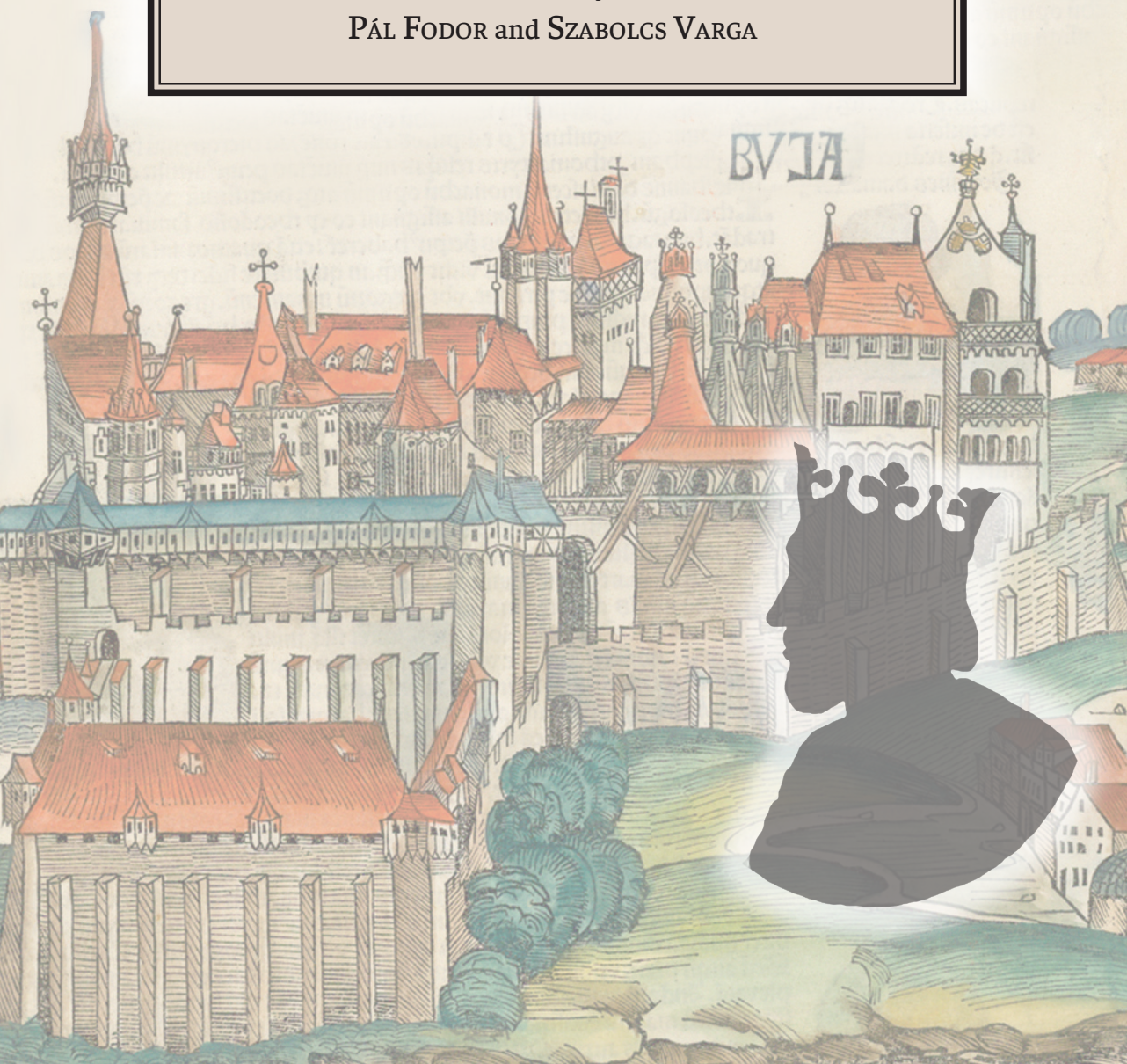


Buda urbs hungarie clarissima regum sedes: in litore danubij sita: hungaria enim ultra et citra danubium latissimas terras occupat: quod citra danubium est: olim pannonia fuit. que ab oriente mesiam ab occidente noricum habuit. septentrione et danubius. austrum illirici montes excepere: que transdanubium hungaria iacet: pars sunt et dacos. non qui nunc in regno: sed palustri populo uani occupant vicina uallem adhuc territorium est quod in quo meritis salubris: et tunc effent: in bos: inde rex dux qui palatium sunt. Anno eius superius et ambitione iectas natione

MOHÁCS 1526–2026
RECONSTRUCTION AND REMEMBRANCE

A FORGOTTEN HUNGARIAN ROYAL DYNASTY: THE SZAPOLYAIS

Edited by
PÁL FODOR and SZABOLCS VARGA



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Norbert C. Tóth*

THE ANTI-OTTOMAN STRUGGLES OF VOIVODE JOHN SZAPOLYAI OF TRANSYLVANIA (1510–1526)

INTRODUCTION

To date, no exhaustive study has been made of the role of John Szapolyai, voivode of Transylvania, in the anti-Ottoman struggles and the protection of Hungary's border. In the absence of basic research, the present study cannot offer a comprehensive analysis, either. So this work therefore provides a contrasting picture: on the one hand it gives a summary of the specialist literature written on the known and researched military campaigns (to Bulgaria and Wallachia). On the other hand, it presents the occurrences of one particular event, the defeat of Zsarnó (Žrnov, Ottoman Havale/Güzelcehisar, today Avala, part of Belgrade), through an exploration of all the relevant source material, thus hinting at some future research opportunities. John Szapolyai's undertakings in 1512–1513 (currently the subject of research) and his policy of 1524–1526 are only mentioned in passing. Furthermore, I have not examined the general military situation, the plans of the Hungarian and Ottoman military leadership, the espionage activity of the two parties, or the situation created by the news received; I present an overview of the armistice and peace agreements of the examined period only in as much as this is strictly necessary.

THE FIRST YEARS (1510–1513)

On 8 November 1510 (or a couple of days earlier) King Vladislaus II of Hungary appointed the hardly twenty-year-old¹ John Szapolyai as voivode of Transylvania.² John, count (Hung. *ispán*, Lat. *comes*) of Szepes, had received an excellent

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1 Tibor Neumann, 'Dózsa legyőzője – Szapolyai János erdélyi vajdasága (1510–1526)', *Székhelyföld* 18:11 (2014) 95.

2 Zsigmond Jakó, 'Az erdélyi vajdák kinevezéséről', in Idem, *Társadalom, egyház, művelődés. Tanulmányok Erdély történelméhez*. Budapest, 1997, 84; *Arch.* I. 88.

education; even though, due to his age, he had no experience of battle, I would not call him incompetent, because in 1506, during the wars against King of the Romans Maximilian I of Habsburg, he fought alongside palatine Imre Perényi and captain general of the Lower Parts and *ispán* of Temes Józsa Somi, as the third captain general.³ The position of voivode of Transylvania became vacant upon the resignation of Count Péter Szentgyörgyi (who also held the office of judge royal), who, due to his illness, was unable to remain in office as it entailed military duties.⁴ At the same time the other border protection commander, the *ispán* of Temes (*comes comitatus Temesiensis*), was also appointed, although the post had by then been vacant for two years because of the death of Józsa Somi. This position was obtained⁵ by István Báthori of Ecsed, nephew of a previous voivode of Transylvania of the same name.⁶

Neither the time of the appointments nor the identical family background of the two men can be regarded as a coincidence. The former was motivated by the military situation: the seven-year peace treaty with Sultan Bayezid (1481–1512) had expired, and in 1510 only an armistice agreement could be negotiated with him. Furthermore, neither did news about his heir, Selim, augur well for the Hungarian military leadership.⁷ On the other hand, paying frontier soldiers serving at border castles and occasionally employed mercenaries was the task of the current *ispán*-captain general or of the voivode, who made the payments retrospectively. This means that military commanders able to perform these duties ‘with their own resources’ had to be found for both positions, or more correctly for all three, if we also include the region of the Dalmatian-Croatian-Slavonian banate.⁸ By this time, the Szapolyai family had without any doubt become the wealthiest family in the country, preceded only by the king; there were approximately 10,000 tax-paying tenant plots on their domains.⁹ The

3 Neumann, ‘Dózsa legyőzője’, 95; Dezső Szabó, ‘Magyar országgyűlések 1505–1508’, *Századok* 42 (1908) 711.

4 Bálint Lakatos, ‘Haag, Mrakes, Cuspinianus és Helianus. A német és francia követek tárgyalásai a magyar elittel az 1510-es tatai országgyűlés idején’, in *Komárom-Esztergom Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei* 17. Tata, 2011, 234.

5 Báthori István, judge royal (1471–1493) and voivode of Transylvania (1479–1493): *Arch. I.* 87; Richárd Horváth and Tibor Neumann, *Ecsedi Bátori István. Egy katonabáró életpályája 1458–1493.* (Magyar Történelmi Emlékek, Értekezések) Budapest, 2012, 48.

6 Norbert C. Tóth, ‘Bátori (III.) István politikai pályafutásának kezdete (1503–1511)’, in Sarolta Szabó and Norbert C. Tóth (eds.), *Az ecsedi Báthoriak a XV–XVII. században.* (Báthori István Múzeum Kiadványai, 34.) Nyírbátor, 2012, 134; *Arch. I.* 124–125; Norbert C. Tóth, ‘Incepturile carierei politice a lui Ștefan Bátori al III-lea (1503–1511)’, *Banatica* 24:2 (2014) 324.

7 Pál Fodor and Géza Dávid, ‘Hungarian–Ottoman Peace Negotiations in 1512–1514’, in Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (eds.), *Hungarian–Ottoman Military and Diplomatic Relations in the Age of Süleyman the Magnificent.* Budapest, 1994, 10–16.

8 On the turbulent situation in the banate, see Tamás Pálosfalvi, ‘Bajnai Both András és a szlavón bánág. Szlavónia, Európa és a törökök, 1504–1513’, in Tibor Neumann and György Rác (eds.), *Honoris causa. Tanulmányok Engel Pál emlékére.* (Társadalom- és Művelődéstörténeti Tanulmányok 40; *Analecta Mediaevalia*, III.) Budapest, Piliscsaba, 2009, 251–300; *Arch. I.* 98–100.

9 Pál Engel, ‘A magyar világi nagybirtok megoszlása a XV. században’, in *Idem, Honor, vár, ispánság. Válogatott tanulmányok.* (Millenniumi Magyar Történelem, Historikusok) Selected,

second and the third places on our imaginary podium were occupied by György, István and András Báthori of Ecsed, with approximately 8,000 tax-paying tenant plots under their command.¹⁰ To this we can add that both newly appointed captains were about the same age: as we have seen, John may have been born in 1490 or 1491, and István a couple of years earlier, sometime between 1485 and 1490,¹¹ so they must also have been on good terms because of their age.

Ever since their appointment, the two commanders had carried out their border protection tasks in constant cooperation.¹² They began harmonizing their military activities as early as autumn 1511, when Szapolyai was sojourning in Southern Transylvania, demonstrably ready for action,¹³ while we can only suspect that Báthori was, in all likelihood, within the territory under his command, since a general mobilisation had been declared along the southern frontier.¹⁴ The reason for the deployment of military forces in the region was that the one-year armistice agreement had expired in August.¹⁵

In the autumn of 1512, the Ottoman army launched a massive attack along the entire front.¹⁶ The underlying reasons can be traced back to spring of the same year: in order to extend the armistice agreement, the Hungarian ruler sent envoys to Sultan Bayezid. By the time the Hungarian delegation arrived in Istanbul, however, the sultan had been deposed (and later even poisoned) by his son Selim. Since Selim's intention was to eliminate his brother Ahmed, who himself was also aspiring to the throne, he offered peace rather than a truce. Yet the Hungarian delegation insisted on keeping to its original plans and therefore returned to Buda without having reached an agreement.¹⁷ To emphasize his dominant position at the meeting table, Selim ordered the district governors along the border to disturb the Hungarian defences, which, unexpectedly, resulted

edited and with notes by Enikő Csukovits. Budapest, 2003, 15, 52; Neumann, 'Dózsa legyőzője', 93–94.

10 Norbert C. Tóth, 'Az ecsedi Báthory család birtokgyarapítási törekvései a XV. század második felében', in Alice Horváth (ed.), *Báthory Miklós váci püspök (1474–1506) emlékezete*. Vác, 2007, 188–189.

11 Norbert C. Tóth, 'Ki kicsoda az ecsedi Bátor családban? A Bátor család ecsedi ágának tagjai 1377–1541', *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Beregi Szemle* 44 (2009) 27.

12 Cf. Norbert C. Tóth, 'Egy legenda nyomában. Szapolyai János és ecsedi Bátor István viszonya 1526 előtt', *Századok* 146 (2012) 450ff.

13 See the letter dated 5 September 1511 (*Szapolyai oklt.* 324–326). See also MNL OL DL 59994 (adjournment of the case due to the expedition against the Ottomans). John Szapolyai sojourned in Beszterce (Bistrița) on 3 September, in Torda on 11 October, in Kolozsvár on 11 November, in Szászsebes on 21 December, and once again in Kolozsvár on 28 December (*Szapolyai oklt.* 326–328).

14 See MNL OL DF 217089, 265885.

15 Fodor and Dávid, 'Hungarian–Ottoman Peace Negotiations', 10–12, 15.

16 Cf. Pálosfalvi, 'Bajnai Both', 291–293. For more details on the occurrences, see Gábor Mikó, 'Kísérlet a szreberniki bántás visszahódítására 1513-ban (Törökellenes hadjáratok lehetőségei a 16. század elején)', *Századok* 154 (2020) 577–620.

17 Fodor and Dávid, 'Hungarian–Ottoman Peace Negotiations', 19–20.

in one troop occupying the castles in the banate of Szrebernik (Srebrenik).¹⁸ At approximately the same time, the *bey* of Semendire (Szendrő/Smederevo) invaded the territory of the captaincy general of the Lower Parts, but the *ispán* of Temes, István Báthori, defeated the Ottoman troops near Illyéd (Ilidia) on 12 October.¹⁹ In the meanwhile, John Szapolyai secured Transylvania with his troops, as he had been tasked to do.²⁰

At the diet held at Epiphany the following year (6 January), the decision was taken to launch a campaign and retake the banate of Szrebernik.²¹ Therefore, and as a consequence of news coming from the Ottoman Empire, almost the entire Hungarian élite was at the southern frontier in the summer (their troops had been there earlier, at the beginning of the year). Palatine Imre Perényi made arrangements on 11 July from the fort of Pekrec (Pakrac),²² while John Szapolyai sent his orders to the Saxons from the city of Szeged on 4 July. In his letter, he called on them to gather with their armies near Alvinc (Vințu de Jos), as the Ottomans were preparing to attack the fort of Szabács (Šabac).²³ This was not the voivode's only task: he was assigned by King Vladislaus II to renovate the fort and the city wall of Pét (Dubova) in the banate of Szörény (Severin). On 13 July the king therefore asked the Saxons to send some craftsmen there to carry out these works.²⁴ In the meantime, Szapolyai left Szeged, and, via Csanád (Cenad), where he sojourned on 16 July,²⁵ he went on to Déva (Deva).²⁶ In August, the Ottoman forces made an incursion from Bosnia, but

18 András Kubinyi, 'A szávaszentdemeter-nagyolaszi győzelem 1523-ban', in Idem, *Nándorfehérvártól Mohácsig. A Mátyás- és a Jagelló-kor hadtörténete*. Budapest, 2007, 123; Idem, 'The Battle of Szávaszentdemeter–Nagyolaszi (1523). Ottoman Advance and Hungarian Defence on the Eve of Mohács', in Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (eds.), *Ottomans, Hungarians, and Habsburgs in Central Europe. The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest*. (The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage, 20.) Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2000, 71–88; Mikó, 'Kísérlet a szreberniki bántság visszahódítására'.

19 Fodor and Dávid, 'Hungarian–Ottoman Peace Negotiations', 17–20; András Kubinyi, 'Budai Kakas János és történeti feljegyzései', in Idem, *Főpapok, egyházi intézmények és vallásosság a középkori Magyarországon* (METEM Könyvek, 22.) Budapest, 1999, 211; Ferenc Szakály, 'Nándorfehérvár 1521-es ostromához', *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* N. S. 25:4 (1978) 488–489.

20 Neumann, 'Dózsa legyőzője', 99; cf. MNL OL DF 255177 (7 October 1512). On 25 December, John Szapolyai was still in Kolozsvár (*Szapolyai oklt.* 333). Sometime around Christmas, a letter of command was written in his name in Torda (MNL OL DL 30999).

21 Gábor Mikó, 'Ismeretlen országgyűlési emlék a Jagelló-korból. Adatok az 1507 és 1514 közötti országgyűlések történetéhez, valamint Werbőczy Hármaskönyvének elkészültéhez', *Történelmi Szemle* 56 (2014) 468.

22 MNL OL DF 232380; cf. Pálosfalvi, 'Bajnai Both', 299.

23 *Szapolyai oklt.* 337; Neumann, 'Dózsa legyőzője', 99.

24 MNL OL DF 245726 (*Commissio propria domini regis*).

25 *Szapolyai oklt.* 338 (16 July 1513).

26 *Szapolyai oklt.* 339 (30 August 1513). On 8 August (MNL OL DF 277734), 1 September (András W. Kovács and Antal Valentiny, *A Wass család cegei levéltára*. [Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Levéltára, 3.] Kolozsvár, 2006, No. 600) and 15 September (MNL OL DL 30537), charters are issued in his name in Déva, but they may have been issued by his protonotary. This is reinforced by the fact that his vice-voivode, Miklós Túróci, also signed some documents there (e.g. Kovács and Valentiny, *A Wass család*, No. 599).

the newly appointed Dalmatian-Croatian-Slavonian *ban*,²⁷ Péter Beriszló, bishop of Veszprém, inflicted a serious defeat on them at Dubica (today in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Meanwhile John Szapolyai, voivode of Transylvania, started besieging the fort of Szendrő, with the clear intention of bringing relief to the *ban*.²⁸ After the ‘war season’ and the campaign ended, the voivode returned home, or better to say to Buda, and did not arrive back in his province until the end of the year.²⁹ (See the map on the following page.)

THE BULGARIAN CAMPAIGN (1514)

John Szapolyai most likely celebrated New Year’s Eve in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), from where, at the end of February, he travelled to Székelyvásárhely (Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureş) to administer justice at the court of the Székelys. After the meeting drew to a close, he travelled to Görgény (Gurghiu), where he spent two weeks before continuing his trip to Szászsebes (Sebeş) in southern Transylvania.³⁰ Pursuant to the war plan adopted at the diet of 1514,³¹ and after he had held up the Ottoman envoy on his journey back home from Buda, he is likely to have set off to catch up with his troops.³² In Tibor Neumann’s apposite words, we “in essence know nothing” of the raid,³³ but, thanks to some indirect information, certain things at least are clear. The army led by Szapolyai is likely to have crossed the border in the middle of May. Since the campaign came to be coined as ‘Bulgarian’, they must have entered the territory of the Ottoman Empire at Szörény, and, following the line of the river Danube, they may have reached the area around the castle of Vidin. Transylvanian troops did not take part in the raid, as it did not concern the defence of the province, but the *banderia* controlled by prelates, barons, and also by counties (possibly in the Lower Parts) did do so (this would also explain the initial successes of the rebelling troops led by György Dózsa in May and June).³⁴ In a letter written immediately after his return, Miklós Túróci, deputy voivode of Transylvania, called the raid a “lucky tour”,³⁵ and there is no reason for doubt in this respect: the aim of the incursion into Ottoman territory may clearly have been to cause a disturbance, and to highlight the Hungarian peace proposal made to Sultan

27 *Arch.* I. 100.

28 Pálosfalvi, ‘Bajnai Both’, 298; Fodor and Dávid, ‘Hungarian–Ottoman Peace Negotiations’, 26.

29 Tibor Neumann, ‘Bulgária–Erdély–Temesvár. Szapolyai János és a parasztháború’, in Norbert C. Tóth and Tibor Neumann (eds.), *Keresztesekből lázadók. Tanulmányok 1514 Magyarországról.* (Magyar Történelmi Emlékek, Értekezések) Budapest, 2015, 110.

30 *Ibid.*, 110; Norbert C. Tóth, ‘Az 1514. márciusi országgyűlés. Politikatörténeti események Magyarországon a parasztháború kitöréséig’, in C. Tóth and Neumann (eds.), *Keresztesekből lázadók*, 44–45.

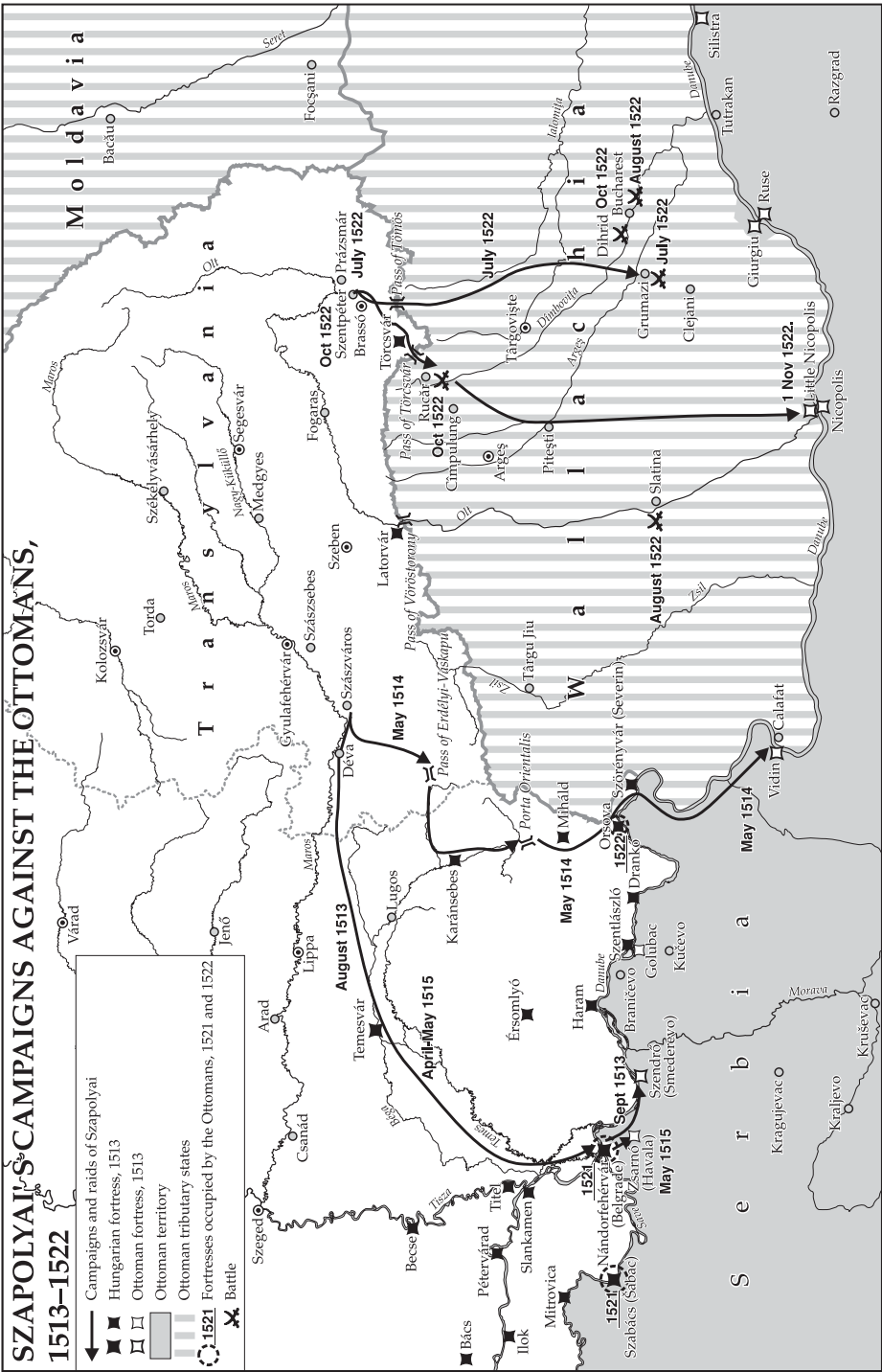
31 On this, see C. Tóth, ‘Az 1514. márciusi országgyűlés’, 63–69.

32 *Ibid.*, 66.

33 Neumann, ‘Bulgária–Erdély–Temesvár’, 110.

34 *Ibid.*, 111–112.

35 *Ibid.*, 111: note 41.



Selim, who at the time was heading to Asia Minor.³⁶ By the time the army, led by John Szapolyai, returned to Karánsebes (Caransebeș), the situation in Hungary had changed substantially, and the military manoeuvres planned at the diet were cancelled.³⁷

THE SIEGE OF ZSARNÓ (1515)³⁸

In December 1514, John Szapolyai, voivode of Transylvania and royal captain general,³⁹ was already back in Kolozsvár, where he remained until February 1515, presumably to deal with the consequences of the uprising.⁴⁰ He subsequently left Transylvania, and in mid-February we find him on his own domains in Lippa (Lipova),⁴¹ from where he travelled to the territory of the banate of Szörény: one of his letters from the first half of March was written in Lugos (Lugoj).⁴² The next reliable item of evidence on Szapolyai's whereabouts is from 21 May, when he was once again in Szászsebes, Transylvania.⁴³ The first information on what happened between the two dates can be found in the will of Imre Török, *ban* of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade), dated 1 May: according to the will, Imre Török dictated his final wish while he was preparing for a campaign against the Ottomans.⁴⁴ That the campaign did indeed take place is proved by several sources: the first of these, which also gives an account of the voivode's defeat, is a letter dated 15 May and sent by King Sigismund of Poland to his wife Borbála, John Szapolyai's sister.⁴⁵ The second can be found in Imre Perényi's letter of command from 13 June,⁴⁶ while the third is also a letter of command, but written by John Szapolyai on 3 August.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, our charter sources fail us in

36 *Ibid.*, 112, 152; C. Tóth, 'Az 1514. márciusi országgyűlés', 65.

37 Neumann, 'Bulgária–Erdély–Temesvár', 151.

38 For a summary on the campaign, see Tamás Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács. A History of Ottoman–Hungarian Warfare, 1389–1526* (The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage, 63.) Leiden, Boston, 2018, 351–353; C. Tóth, 'Egy legenda nyomában', 452: note 60.

39 *capitaneus generalis regie maiestatis* – the title first appears by his name on 1 December 1514 (MNL OL DF 245739). The last known information on his office on this occasion is from 8 March 1516 (*Szapolyai oklt.* 374).

40 *Szapolyai oklt.* 359–360.

41 *Szapolyai oklt.* 361 (18 February 1515).

42 MNL OL DF 254967. Between 1513 and 1519 John Szapolyai also held the office of *ban* of Szörény (*Arch.* I. 153).

43 MNL OL DL 63004.

44 *ingressus ad partes infidelium pro tuicione huius incliti regni Hungarie*. MNL OL DL 89052, edited in *Enyingi Török Bálint*. Introduced and published by József Bessenyei. Budapest, 1994, charter No. 1.

45 *Acta Tomicianae*, III. 371: *Ceterum Mti. vre. incognitum esse nouimus, clarissimum dnum. vojevodam, germanum Mtis. vre., generum nostrum charissimum, nuper in Turcas ita aduerso Marte pugnasse, ut, copiarum parte amissa, prelio excedere sit coactus. Licet autem nondum nobis satis constet, quanta christianorum militum clade depugnatum sit, certum tamen est, rem ab orthodoxe pietatis hostibus bene ac prospere gestam.*

46 MNL OL DF 269734: *quod quamvis superioribus diebus, tempore quo scilicet domino wayvoda Transilvanis (!) in expeditione contra Thurcos se preparabat.*

47 MNL OL DL 63005: *hiis novissimis diebus, tempore scilicet expeditionis nostre contra Thurcos.*

this respect, as no further information is preserved about the campaign in any of them.⁴⁸

The most detailed account of these events can be found in the work *Memoria rerum*, according to which the army led by voivode John, István Báthori, *ispán* of Temes, Imre Török and Mihály Paksi, *bans* of Nándorfehérvár, and the 'king's lieutenant' László Chertinger⁴⁹ left for the campaign on 24 April on the king's orders. Soldiers from the Jaksics and Szakolyi families also took part in the manoeuvre. The troops set out from Nándorfehérvár and, following the line of the Danube, reached the fort of Zsarnó and started besieging it. Yet Sinan [recte: Bali], the *sanjakbeyi* of Semendire (Smederevo), "struck back against them with some Turks and some local people. There, the Hungarians were defeated, routed, and they lost two lords, Mihály Paxy and the king's previously mentioned German lieutenant, and had to leave behind outstanding fighters, entire camps, cannons, treasure, coaches, and those who were able to leave left, in great shame and having suffered great damage, and returned to Nándorfehérvár. In the struggle, Sinan Bey drove away the enemy as one would drive away animals; ten Turks, as they say, drove away one hundred armed soldiers."⁵⁰

This description from an unknown author is well complemented by a report from the other side, prepared for Prince Süleyman by Báli, *sanjakbeyi* of Semendire. According to this report, the Hungarian army crossed the Danube on 21 April and started besieging the fort of Zsarnó. The Ottomans mobilized the entire soldiery of Rumelia and ordered it to gather in Szendrő. In the end they did not wait for the entire force to gather, as the defenders of the fort in desperation asked for assistance, and so, under the leadership of Bali Bey, a counterattack was launched against the Hungarians. According to the report, one of the Ottoman troops attacked the infantry, another the camp, and after a long and violent struggle the army, led by Szapolyai, had to retreat, but did so in an organized manner. Two of the Hungarian generals – Mihály Paksi, *ban* of Nándorfehérvár, and Gáspár, *ban* of Szabács – lost their lives in the struggles, and their heads were sent to the sultan.⁵¹

48 This is somewhat surprising, as at least a dozen letters dated between early May and late June 1515 are known to exist, in which one would, with our current mindset, expect the event to be mentioned: the envoys of Brassó did not mention this in their letter sent from Pozsony to their city on 17 May (MNL OL DF 246708); likewise, no mention of it was made by Ferenc Vajai in his letter from Pozsony (Bratislava) on 29 May (MNL OL DL 97646), even though he reported about many other things (the uprising of the tenant peasants [Hung. *jobbágy*] in Carinthia; the occupation of the forts of Bočac and Kotor in Bosnia by the Ottomans).

49 We know his full name from Tamás Pelei's 'notes on the history of the period' (Bálint Lakatos, 'Az erdélyi káptalan és a püspöki udvar tagjai görbe tükörben. Történeti bejegyzések Pelei Tamás főesperes Erasmus kötetében [1515–c.1530]', *Fons* 16 [2009] 456) and from 1513, when he was captain of the Transylvanian army (C. Tóth, 'Az 1514. márciusi országgyűlés', 46).

50 *Memoria rerum*, 18–19. The deaths of Paksi and Csertinger were also reported by Pelei (Lakatos, 'Pelei Tamás', 456).

51 The report sent to the members of the imperial council by Prince Süleyman has been published, in English translation, by Pál Fodor: 'Wolf on the Border: Yahyapaşaoğlu Bali Bey (?–1527): Expansion and Provincial Elite in the European Confines of the Ottoman Empire in the Early

On the basis of these two reports and the aforementioned charters, it seems possible to reconstruct the essence of the campaign. The Hungarian army, led by John Szapolyai, voivode of Transylvania and royal captain general,⁵² which represented a major military force,⁵³ set out from Nándorfehérvár on 21 April (around the day of Saint George)⁵⁴ to the fort of Zsarnó, only 16 km away. The nearly identical dates presented in the two reports contrast with the previously cited will of Imre Török, dated 1 May, which, judging by its text, had been drawn up before the troops departed.⁵⁵ Until further evidence is uncovered, the contradiction can be resolved in two ways: one possible explanation is that Imre Török joined the army later, possibly after the counterattack of the Ottomans had been launched; another explanation may be that the *ban* wrote his last wish before the clash with the Ottoman relief forces. As the news of the defeat reached Pozsony (Bratislava) on 15 May, the siege of the fort must have lasted for at least two weeks, including the time needed for deployment, so the battle itself is likely to have taken place sometime before 10 May.⁵⁶ (The news from Nándorfehérvár reached the negotiations in Pozsony within five days.)⁵⁷

Several major figures in the Hungarian army lost their lives in the fight against the relief forces. Even though each source mentions two names, the names listed only partially overlap. The death of Imre Török's companion, Mihály Paksi, *ban* of Nándorfehérvár, is mentioned in both aforementioned sources, as well as in the notes of Tamás Pelei and in the letter written in Pozsony on 22 May by György Szatmári, bishop of Pécs.⁵⁸ László Chertinger's name features among the deceased in the *Memoria rerum* and in the works of Tamás Pelei and Szerémi. The name of Gáspár Paksi, however, only appears

Sixteenth Century', in Pál Fodor, Nándor E. Kovács and Bence Péri (eds.), *Šerefe: Studies in Honour of Prof. Géza Dávid on His Seventieth Birthday*. (21st-Century Studies in Humanities) Budapest, 2019, 77–79.

52 John Szapolyai's title of royal captain general explains how he was able to lead the troops to territories far beyond his place of duty: as captain general he was more senior than all *bans* and the count (*ispán/comes*) of Temes, who in turn was also the captain general of the Lower Parts. For more details on this, see Mikó, 'Ismeretlen országgyűlési emlék', 466ff.

53 Apart from the names of the Hungarian leaders listed, this is also confirmed by the report of the Venetian envoy, which states that many soldiers were deployed (Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 351).

54 According to György Szerémi this took place in May (Szerémi, *Magyarország romlásáról*, 71–72), while according to Miklós Istvánffy it occurred in July (Istvánffy, *Magyarok dolgairól*, I/1. 154). Both works need to be treated critically; for such criticism, see Gábor Nagy, 'Szapolyai István és János alakja Istvánffy Miklós *Historiae*jában', *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis. Sectio Philosophica* 13:3 (2008) 267–294, especially 273, 276, 278.

55 See earlier in the article.

56 On 2 May the people of Pozsony did not yet know of Mihály Paksi's death (MNL OL DL 47103). In his letter to István Rozgonyi sent from Buda on 8 May, secretary János Gosztonyi gave an account of various developments, but he did not mention the anti-Ottoman campaign (MNL OL DL 25562).

57 The distance was approximately 550 km, and a mounted envoy could generally travel a distance of 110 km a day.

58 MNL OL DL 89054.

on the list of casualties due to a case of mistaken identity. The Ottoman report mentions only a “*ban* of Szabács” (without giving his name),⁵⁹ so this person could not have been Gáspár Paksi, as he had been *ispán* of Arad since 1522⁶⁰ and had never held the office of *ban*. Count György Merzini (Korbáviai), on the other hand, who was at the time the *ban* of Szabács, did indeed die at Zsarnó, at least according to Szerémi’s chronicle.⁶¹ Furthermore, we have evidence that, in addition to voivode John Szapolyai of Transylvania, *ispán* István Báthori of Temes, *bans* Imre Török and Mihály Paksi of Nándorfehérvár and *ban* György Merzini (Korbáviai) of Szabács, royal captain László Chertinger and the *barones banderiat*⁶² István and/or Márk Jaksics⁶³ and János Szakolyi,⁶⁴ both Miklós Derencsényi⁶⁵ – later the Szapolyais’ castellan and *ispán* of Torna⁶⁶ – and Jakab Bánfi of Alsólendva⁶⁷ also participated in the campaign. As far as can be judged on the basis of the information available to us, the voivode’s campaign was the result of concerted action in accordance with decades of cooperation between the three captains defending the borders: while the Dalmatian-Croatian-Slavonian *ban*, Péter Beriszló, bishop of Veszprém, was at the frontier of his banate ready for action,⁶⁸ the Transylvanian voivode and the captain general of the Lower Parts, István Báthori, launched a pre-emptive attack within their own confines to ease the situation in the banate.

After the failed siege, those who survived returned to their places of duty. So the voivode of Transylvania returned to Transylvania, where he stayed until the middle of October,⁶⁹ and worked on organizing the defence of the southern borders of the province against Ottoman invasion, which did not in the end happen.⁷⁰

59 Fodor, ‘Wolf on the Border’, 79.

60 *Arch.* II. 31.

61 *Arch.* I. 148.

62 Cf. act 22 of 1498: *Decreta regni mediaevalis Hungariae / The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary 1490–1526*. (The Laws of Hungary, Series I/4.) From a manuscript by Ferenc Döry, edited and translated by Péter Banyó and Martyn Rady, with the assistance of János M. Bak. Idyllwild, 2012, 102.

63 Pál Engel, *Magyar középkori adattár. Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301–1457. – Középkori Magyar genealógia*. (Arcanum Digitéka–CD-ROM) Budapest, 2001, Jaksics (Nagylaki).

64 *Ibid.*, Gútkeled kindred, 1st Rakamazi line, table 3: Szokoli (correctly: Szakolyi).

65 MNL OL DF 269734-5 (was adjourned for the period of the military campaign).

66 *Arch.* II. 278.

67 MNL OL DL 63005 (his servitor is mentioned as a participant in the military campaign).

68 Cf. his letter written from Pekrec on 13 April 1515 (MNL OL DL 68498), and the letter of King Vladislaus II written to the Slavonian estates on 19 April 1515 (MNL OL DF 268172).

69 See his letters (*Szapolyai oklt.* 363–364, 366, 370, 372).

70 Neumann, ‘Dózsa legyőzője’, 100 (table).

NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR (1521)⁷¹

The failure at Zsarnó brought a half-decade interruption to John Szapolyai's anti-Ottoman wars. While, with the exception of two years, Szapolyai spent an ever longer period in his province each year, only once, in the summer of 1519, did he have to mobilize the Transylvanian army to protect Moldavia – though, in the end, no armed intervention took place.⁷²

At the time of the Ottoman siege and occupation of Nándorfehérvár in 1521, Szapolyai was, pursuant to his official duties, carrying out the defence of his province: at the end of July he was in Szászsebes⁷³ and in Szászváros (Orăștie), the usual gathering place for Transylvanian troops.⁷⁴ From there he travelled to Kolozsvár, from where, after a couple of days' sojourn,⁷⁵ he travelled on through Lippa,⁷⁶ then Vanna (Svetozar Miletić), Bodrog county, where he had left his troops,⁷⁷ arriving at the royal camp in Bâta on 13 September.⁷⁸ Here they discussed the military situation,⁷⁹ and, after the sultan's army withdrew, and in order to try to retake the border fortress of key importance, the king and his councillors, at the camp near Mohács,⁸⁰ appointed István Báthori and John Szapolyai captains of the troops to be launched. They also convoked another armed diet to be held in Újlak (Ilok).⁸¹ In the end, however, the campaign did not take place, due to an

71 For the siege and occupation by the Ottomans, together with the earlier literature, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 372–395.

72 Szapolyai *oklt.* 386–390 (1516), 393, 395, 397–400 (1517), 418, 420–421, 427, 431 (1519); Neumann, 'Dózsa legyőzője', 100 (table).

73 26 July 1521 (Szapolyai *oklt.* 457).

74 29 July 1521; 4 August 1521 (Szapolyai *oklt.* 458–459).

75 18–31 August 1521 (MNL OL DF 275293; Szapolyai *oklt.* 460–461).

76 Ede Margalits, *Horvát történelmi repertorium. Vol. I.* Budapest, 1900, 336.

77 *Memoria rerum*, 22.

78 MNL OL DL 25632.

79 Cf. MNL OL DL 23584, DL 25632.

80 On 13 September, they are still in Bâta (MNL OL DL 23584, *manu propria*), the king is demonstrably in Mohács from 19 September (MNL OL DL 104408, *Commissio propria domini regis*) until 30 September (*Documenta ad historiam familiae Bátori de Ecsed spectantia. Vol. I. Diplomata 1393–1540.* [A Nyíregyházi Jósza András Múzeum Kiadványai, 67.] Ad edendum praepraverunt Richardus Horváth, Tiburtius Neumann, Norbertus C. Tóth. Nyíregyháza, 2011, 322). On 2 October, the court is likely to have been there: András Kubinyi, 'Főúri étrend tábori körülmények között', in Pál Fodor, Géza Pálffy and István György Tóth (eds.), *Tanulmányok Szakály Ferenc emlékére.* (Gazdaság- és Társadalomtörténeti Kötetek, 2.) Budapest, 2002, 249–261. – For the meeting, see Ferenc Szakály, *A mohácsi csata.* (Sorsdöntő Történelmi Napok, 2.) Budapest, 1975, 17.

81 *Acta Tomiciana*, V. 401: *Stephanum de Bathor palatinum et Joannem comitem Scepusiensem, vojevodom Transilvaniae, capitaneos hujus expeditionis generales pari auctoritate prefecimus eosque primum ac civitatem Vilak misimus, ubi die dominico proximo (6 October) conventum optimatum, procerum ac totius nobilitatis nostro edicto celebrabitur.* 1 October 1521, Mohács, King Louis II's letter to King Sigismund I the Old of Poland. On 18 October Szapolyai was in Újlak (Szapolyai *oklt.* 461).

epidemic that had broken out among the soldiers;⁸² at a meeting held in Pécs,⁸³ it was decided that it should be postponed until the following year, and that, in order to secure the defence against fraying Ottoman armies, the palatine should be sent to Pétervárad (Petrovaradin), while Szapolyai and his army should stay in Syrmia.⁸⁴ In addition, a diet was convoked in Buda on the day of Elisabeth. The king left Pécs at the end of October (he was still there on the 26th)⁸⁵ and returned to Buda (on 3 November);⁸⁶ on 8 November, Szapolyai was already in Nagytaranya (today a destroyed settlement near Savino Selo, Serbia) in Bács county,⁸⁷ and it was at about the same time that Báthori went to Buda, as well.⁸⁸

CAMPAIGNS IN WALLACHIA (1522)⁸⁹

At the diet of 1521, held on the day of Elisabeth, both Báthori and Szapolyai were elected captain generals of the following year's anti-Ottoman campaigns, and, as soon as the king left for Bohemia, they became actively involved in the planning of the country's defences. They started recruiting soldiers, preparing border fortresses, and they also decided on personnel matters: they appointed János Kállai Vitéz instead of Miklós Gerlistyei to lead the fort of Szörény, and sent infantry soldiers there and to Titel, while they dispatched Miklós Macedóniai to Temesvár (Timișoara). After all this, and shortly after the royal couple had left Buda, John Szapolyai set off – leading one thousand five hundred mercenary soldiers he hired with the money provided by the royal treasurers – to defend the place where he served, Transylvania.

At almost the same time as the occupation of Nándorfehérvár, Neagoe Basarab, ruler of Wallachia, died. Even though he was followed on the throne by

82 Istvánffy, *Magyarok dolgairól*, 183.

83 The king's presence can be shown from 6 October (MNL OL DL 31164, *commissio propria*; his order to captain general John Szapolyai).

84 *Wayvoda Transilvanus ad confinia recessit cum paucis, si quid efficere poterint, palatinus adhuc in vado circa Peterwaradya iacet*. Lajos Thallóczy and Antal Áldásy (eds.), *A Magyarország és Szerbia közötti összeköttetések oklevéltára 1198–1526*. (Magyarország Melléktartományainak Oklevéltára, 2.) Budapest, 1907, 355: 7 October 1521, Pécs, letter from János Bebek to Ferenc Dóci, castellan of Óvár; cf. Istvánffy, *Magyarok dolgairól*, 182. Dezső Szabó interpreted all this as showing that the voivode had left King Louis in Pécs (Dezső Szabó, *A magyar országgyűlések története II. Lajos korában*. Budapest, 1909, 47).

85 MNL OL DL 86102 (*manu propria*). – On the 28th he was probably still in Pécs (MNL OL DL 86756, record of Tamás Szalaházi, the parish priest of Beregszász, and royal secretary).

86 MNL OL DL 47438 (record of Fülöp Móré, grand provost of Eger, royal secretary). According to Dezső Szabó, the king was already in Buda on 13 October (Szabó, *A magyar országgyűlések*, 47, on the basis of charter MNL OL DL 23589, the date on which is indeed the same [*in festo Colomanni*], but, as it is a copy, it is almost entirely certain that at the time the scribe misread the name of the holiday).

87 Szapolyai *oklt.* 463.

88 *Memoria rerum*, 23.

89 For more detail, see Norbert C. Tóth, 'Szapolyai János erdélyi vajda 1522. évi havasalföldi hadjáratai. Havasalföld korlátozott függetlenségének biztosítása', *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 125:4 (2012) 987–1014.

his son Teodosie, several pretenders appeared in the country. Initially, the leader of the territories neighbouring Wallachia, Mehmed Bey, district governor of Silistra, intervened in the battles for the throne on Teodosie's side. Nevertheless, in December 1521, he had the voivode executed. The throne was occupied for a short period by Radu de la Afumați, but he did not enjoy the support of Mehmed Bey, either. What is more, in March 1522, he was even defeated by him at the settlement of Clejani, after which he fled to Transylvania. The royal court of Hungary did not stand still in the wake of these events. Although the royal couple, Louis II and Mary, left for their coronation and to settle other matters in Bohemia at the end of February 1522 (and did not return until the end of April 1523), the two captain generals of the country, palatine István Báthori, *ispán* of Temes and captain general of the Lower Parts, and John Szapolyai, hereditary count of Szepes and voivode of Transylvania, took the necessary countermeasures.

John Szapolyai left Buda in the middle of March 1522 and headed for the place he was stationed, Transylvania. He spent the rest of the year near Brassó (Braşov), in the company of Transylvanian and other mercenary troops. Since having a Hungarophile voivode on the throne of Wallachia was of key importance for the defence of Transylvania, Szapolyai tried to cooperate with Radu to change the situation. The first campaign, which took place between 7 and 18 June 1522, had only partial results: although the *bey* was defeated at the settlement of Grumazi, and Radu could be repositioned to the lead of the voivodship, Mehmed Bey returned in the beginning of August and fought three victorious battles (Ghergița, Bucharest and Slatina) against Radu, who once again fled to Transylvania. The second campaign took place in the autumn. This time, serious preparations had been made to ensure the outcome: firstly, the campaign was scheduled for Autumn (14 October–14 November); secondly, the two captain generals coordinated manoeuvres. While István Báthori put on a display of power in the Lower Parts, Szapolyai joined Radu and made an incursion into Wallachia. At the exit of the Törcsvár (Bran) pass, near Rucăr, they defeated the entire army of Mehmed Bey, upon which the armies separated. Radu led his troops to the capital of his country, Tirgovîște, and fought a decisive battle against Mehmed Bey's remaining army, approximately 50 km south-east of Didrih. He won a full victory, the Ottomans retreated beyond the river Danube, and he retook the princely headquarters.

In the meanwhile, John Szapolyai, voivode of Transylvania, continued his southward journey through the city of Pitești, and, after travelling about 210 km, may have arrived at the siege camp in Kisnikápoly (Turnu Măgurele) before 1 November. Even though he was not able to occupy the fort, he pillaged the neighbourhood and collected a tremendous amount of booty before returning to Hungary the same way he had come. As a result of the two campaigns, despite some struggles that flared up over the next two years, and despite Radu having to flee to Transylvania several times because of Ottoman attacks on his voivodship, he and his descendants were able to preserve Wallachia's limited independence from the Porte.

It is noteworthy, and certainly not a coincidence, that István Báthori, *ispán* of Temes county, was along the southern frontier, more explicitly in Futak (Futog), at exactly the same time (October–November) as Szapolyai was fighting in the neighbouring principality of Wallachia (16 October–13 November). The Hungarian military leadership was thus aware of the opportunities provided by the enemy's attention being divided. It can be no accident that in the summer of 1526 they suggested a diversion in Wallachia.⁹⁰

MOHÁCS (1526)⁹¹

The present essay is unable to offer a detailed presentation of the events of 1526, as the sources describing the occurrences prior to the battle have not yet been uncovered. Therefore we will have to be content to reconstruct Szapolyai's movements until the end of August on the basis of charters issued by the voivode in the same year. (I will not touch upon the historically inaccurate issue of whether or not the voivode was deliberately late for the battle; modern historical literature has already provided an answer to that question.)⁹² From late November 1525, John Szapolyai was in his province, in Déva. He attended the wedding between the Wallachian voivode Radu and the daughter of the earlier voivode, Basarab. He also gave commands regarding the garrison of the fort of Pojnár (Poenari), located in the territory of said voivodeship.⁹³ From here, he moved his seat to Szeben (Sibiu), a settlement he left after some 'excursions' in March,⁹⁴ after which he moved to Enyed (Aiud), the assigned mobilization point for the Transylvanian forces.⁹⁵ From the provincial diet of Enyed he travelled to Szászsebes, from where he kept an eye on the southern borders of Transylvania, and made reports to King Louis II on the situation and on the intention of the Ottomans.⁹⁶ At the same time, preparations were also made to protect themselves from Ottoman incursions.⁹⁷ He convoked a provincial diet to be held in the following month in Medgyes (Mediaș),⁹⁸ where it was decided to mobilize the entire Transylvanian army because of the expected Ottoman attack.⁹⁹ From Medgyes, John Szapolyai returned via Szeben¹⁰⁰ to Szászsebes, where we know he was present until late July.¹⁰¹ While he was there, he returned for a short time to Medgyes, since the king's envoy, who arrived on 27 July, informed the attendees of the partial provincial diet of the royal (council's)

90 János B. Szabó, *A mohácsi csata*. Budapest, 2006, 169–170.

91 For a summary, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 424–444.

92 See B. Szabó, *A mohácsi csata*, 168–171.

93 *Szapolyai oklt.* 506–508 (1 December 1525).

94 2, 17 January 1526; 25 February 1526 (*Szapolyai oklt.* 518, 510–511).

95 Neumann, 'Dózsa legyőzője', 100; *Szapolyai oklt.* 512–513 (12–13 March 1526).

96 16 March–29 April 1526 (*Szapolyai oklt.* 514–515, 517–519).

97 *Szapolyai oklt.* 521 (29 April 1526).

98 *Szapolyai oklt.* 520 (29 April 1526).

99 *Szapolyai oklt.* 522–524; Neumann, 'Dózsa legyőzője', 100.

100 24–25 May 1526 (*Szapolyai oklt.* 522–523).

101 10 June–31 July 1526 (*Szapolyai oklt.* 524, 527–528).

resolution. Consequent to the resolution it was then decided that a major part of the Transylvanian military forces should gather in Kolozsvár on 9 August¹⁰² and then head to Hungary. The voivode was demonstrably in the city from 11 August¹⁰³ and he may have set off by stagecoach to attend the king sometime after 24 August¹⁰⁴ (as was reported in detail in the work of István Brodarics).¹⁰⁵

SUMMARY

The decade and a half of John Szapolyai's rule as voivode of Transylvania can be judged as successful from the point of view both of contemporaries and of posterity. The province was not attacked during this period, not even once. Furthermore, with the consent and mandate of the royal court, the voivode led several campaigns and raids to the areas neighbouring Transylvania, and even to territories further away. With the exception of the siege of Zsarnó, his campaigns and raids were successful, and his two expeditions to Wallachia during the same year stand out from the military history of the era in every respect. Apart from his anti-Ottoman struggles, he earned his fame as a successful military leader rather early, by squashing the uprising of 1514 without any major sacrifice; not even the failure suffered at Zsarnó the following year could tarnish his glory. For the Hungarian nobility, eager to continue the anti-Ottoman wars, it may thus have seemed an obvious choice to make John Szapolyai, who had already proved himself in these campaigns, king of Hungary.

102 *Szapolyai oklt.* 528; Neumann, 'Dózsa legyőzője', 100.

103 *Szapolyai oklt.* 530.

104 On this day he was still in Kolozsvár (*Szapolyai oklt.* 531).

105 István Brodarics, *Igaz leírás a magyaroknak a törökkel történt mohácsi összecsapásáról*. Translation by Tibor Kardos, in Tamás Katona (ed.), *Mohács emlékezete*. Budapest, 1976, 30.

MOHÁCS 1526–2026
RECONSTRUCTION AND REMEMBRANCE

From the 1460s onwards, the Szapolyai family played a decisive role in the history of Hungary for more than a hundred years. The studies in this volume highlight the extraordinary careers of members of the family's first generation, which made them the greatest landowning magnates of the country. Relying on the wealth, prestige and military force of the dynasty, John, a member of the second generation, successfully governed Transylvania for a decade and a half; it was partly due to this achievement that in 1526 the majority of Hungarian noblemen found him worthy of the orphaned throne of Louis II. The writings in this volume explore King John's foreign, urban and church politics, the cultural trends at his court, as well as his relations with the Ottoman Empire, and those of his successors (Queen Isabella and her son John II, elected king of Hungary). What we learn from these texts is that the history of the Szapolyais can be divided into two parts: after their successful rise as kings of Hungary, their family background was no longer sufficient for effective governance. The country became a battleground for global empires, and the Szapolyais, similarly to the Jagiellonians, were unable to overcome their vulnerable circumstances. After centuries of the subject being neglected, this volume undertakes to give the last Hungarian royal dynasty the evaluation it deserves.

