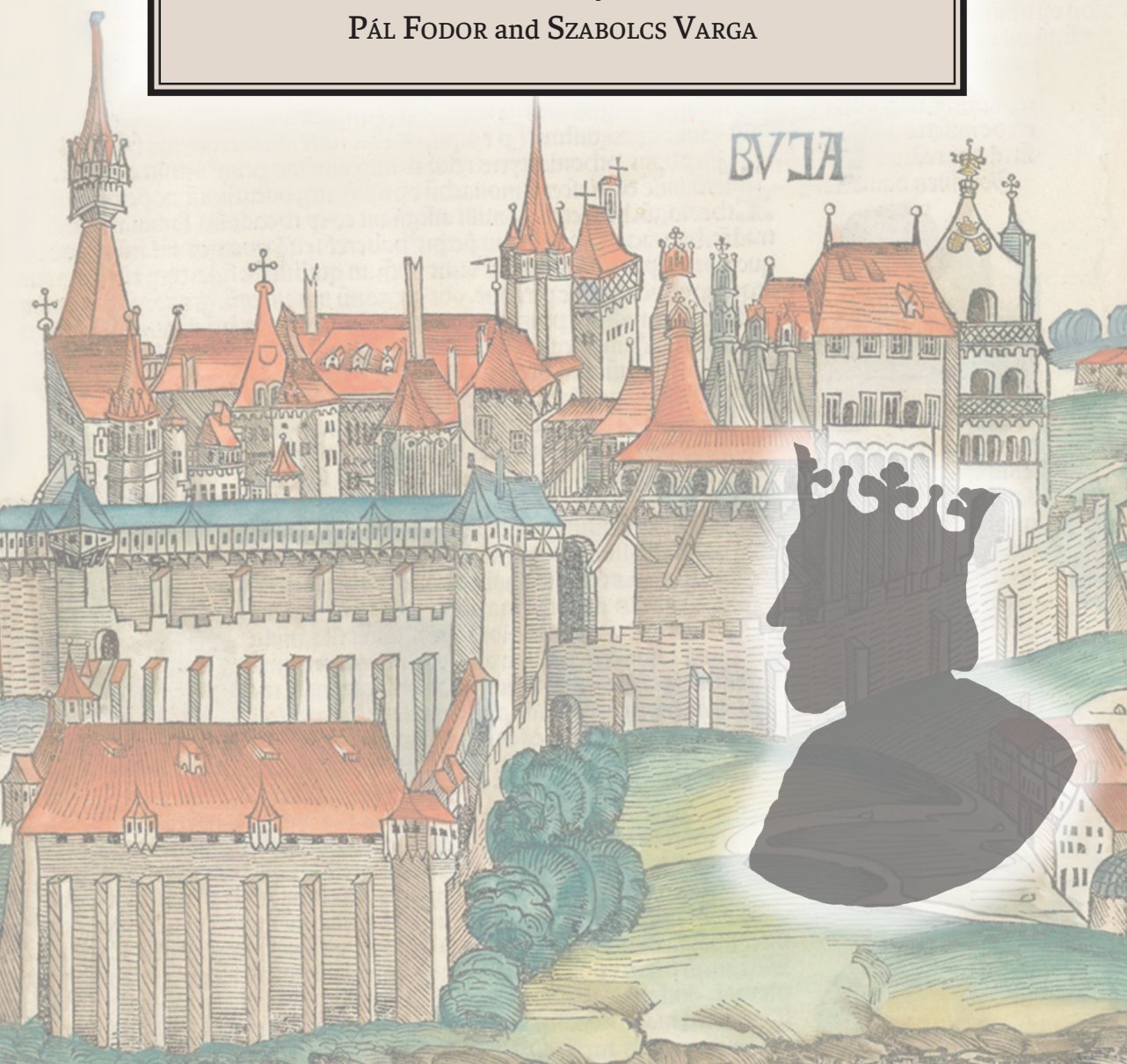


Buda urbs hungarie clarissima regum sedes: in litore danubij sita: hungaria enim ultra et citra danubium latissimas terras occupat: quod citra danubium est: olim pannonia fuit. que ab oriente mesiam ab occidente noricum habuit. septentrione et danubius. austrum illirici montes exceptere: que transdanubium hungaria iacet: pars hinc dacia: hinc dacos. non qui nunc in dacia regnant: sed palustri populo qui vicinam occupant vicinam valaciam. adhuc territorium est quod in quo meritis salubris: et in bos: inde rex dux qui palatium sunt. Anno eius supposita 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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Szabolcs Varga*

HOW THE SZAPOLYAI FAMILY WAS REMEMBERED FROM THE 16TH TO THE 20TH CENTURY¹

INTRODUCTION

Hungarian historical memory has treated the Szapolyais with extreme negligence, which is all the more apparent if compared to the Hunyadi family: while ‘sites of memory’ (*loci memoriae*, *lieu de mémoire*)² related to the Hunyadi family can be found both outside the current borders of Hungary, as in Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade), Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) and Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), and within it (Visegrád, Buda), there are no such sites at all related to the Szapolyai family.³ One could of course rightly argue that the Hunyadi family deserves to be commemorated, since John Hunyadi (1409–1456) earned his title of ‘Defeater of the Turks’ on his own merit, while his son Matthias, the greatest ruler of the Kingdom of Hungary of the late Middle Ages, was an outstanding politician, victorious military leader and a generous patron all in one. The members of the Hunyadi family were, as research reveals, far from impeccable, however.⁴ Despite this, starting from the middle third of the 16th century, the family’s cult was constantly enriched. In the light of their acknowledged political achievements, the history of the Hunyadi family has become a living historical memory, with its own rites and sites in the Carpathian basin.

* Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities; varga.szabolcs@btk.mta.hu.

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2 Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory. The Construction of the French Past*. New York, 1996–1998.

3 On the remembrance of Matthias, see Enikő Csukovits (ed.), *Mátyás és a humanizmus*. (Nemzet és Emlékezet) Budapest, 2008, 211–687, especially 343–346.

4 Pál Engel, ‘A szegedi eskü és a váradi béke. Adalék az 1444. év eseménytörténetéhez’, in Éva H. Balázs, Erik Fügedi and Ferenc Maksay (eds.), *Mályusz Elemér Emlékkönyv*. (Társadalom- és Művelődéstörténeti Tanulmányok) Budapest, 1984, 77–79; András Kubinyi, ‘Hunyadi Mátyás, a személyiség és a király’, *Aetas* 22:3 (2007) 83–100.

As regards the Szapolyai family, we are not today able to speak of a living memory, despite, by the early 16th century, its members becoming major political actors, even at an international level. The family's dynastic relationships, their estates, constructions and the humanists that so frequently appeared at their court could all have played their part in building up a cult around the family.⁵ The castles of Trencsén (Trenčín) and Szepes (Spišský hrad), together with the chapel of Szepeshely (Spišská Kapitula) located in the Szepesség (Spiš) region, which was the ancestral territory of the family, all had the potential to become the Szapolyais' representative and religious centres, yet they did not.⁶ This phenomenon is understandable, given that it took place in the early modern period, since this is when the region came under the rule of Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I, and, following the change of empire, the new regime sought to remove all traces of the Szapolyai family, as verifiably happened in Kassa (Košice):⁷ the coat of arms of the Szapolyai family was torn down and desecrated by being bound to a dog and burnt. In the 18th century, there was no living cult of the Szapolyai family, so the family entered modern historical memory, born in the 19th century, as a national royal dynasty of Hungarian origin.⁸ This is why King John's full-figure statue was included among the sculptures decorating the Hungarian parliament building in Budapest, on the side facing the river Danube.⁹ It was approximately at this time that János Fadrusz completed his monumental sculpture composition of King Matthias, which still adorns the main square of Kolozsvár. One of the secondary figures of the composition represents István Szapolyai: a figure holding the banner of his lord in his right hand, while folding down the eagle banner of the defeated Habsburgs with his left. The message of the piece is symbolic, with Szapolyai, representing the nation, depicted as the governor of Austria and Vienna.¹⁰

Under the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, the Szapolyai family was unable to step out of the shadow of the Hunyadis. While the castle of Vajdahunyad (Hunedoara), known as the Hunyadis' family residence, had become a relic of

5 The works of Tibor Neumann, István Kenyeres, Péter Kasza and Pál Ács in this volume can be cited as good examples of this.

6 For the most recent work on the chapel of Szepeshely, see Magdaléna Janovská and Vladimír Olejník, 'A szepeshelyi (szepeskáptalani) Szent Márton-székesegyház', *Magyar Sion, Új folyam* 12/54 (2018) 77–95.

7 We know from György Szerémi's description that here the Szapolyai coat of arms was torn down and desecrated by binding to a dog and burning it. The poor animal was then chased away from the city: *Interim armam suam super parietem aplicatam lupum retraxerunt et ad unum caniculum ligaverunt cum straminibus, et insuper mingerunt cum vrinis suis et destercoraverant postea eum humana stercora. Et insuper incenderunt strameam super canem et dicebant blasfeman: "Ecce rex canis; ecce Rex canis"*. Szerémi, *Emlékirat*, 197.

8 Zita Horváth, 'A 19. századi történetírás Szapolyai-képe', *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolciensis. Sectio Philosophica* 13:3 (2008) 165–176.

9 Kristóf Zoltán Kelecsényi, *Az Országház szobrai*. (Országházi séták) Budapest, 2017, 56–61.

10 Lajos Szádeczky, 'Mátyás király és Kolozsvár', *Erdélyi Múzeum* 19:8 (1902) 415.

Hungarian national architecture,¹¹ a copy of which was built in Budapest for the millennium celebrations in 1896, John Szapolyai, or Zápolya, as he was called in this period, was commemorated by merely having a few streets named after him. In addition to the 13th district of Budapest, Rákospalota, Dunakeszi, Kecskemét, Temesvár (Timișoara) and Kolozsvár could also boast of streets bearing the name Zápolya. This, however, lasted no longer than a couple of decades, as following the change of regime in Transylvania, street names were quickly changed, and in the 13th district of Budapest, pursuant to communist street-naming practice, in 1952 the street was officially renamed Gogol Street.

The dominant culture in connection with the Szapolyai family is that of silence, which explains why there are so few records of its members in the archives of the Carpathian basin. The figure of King John was not surrounded by any kind of cult; neither were his wife or child perceived in an especially positive way. In stories that emerged from time to time about their lives, they either featured as people who had failed in their ambitions or their example stood as a warning: John's absence from the Battle of Mohács, the humiliating way Isabella left Buda and then also Transylvania, and the meeting of John II (better known as John Sigismund) with the aged Sultan Süleyman, the embodiment of the fatal destiny of the Kingdom of Hungary, in Zimony (Zemun) in 1566. The way the family was perceived developed hand in hand with the changes in the layers of memory regarding the Battle of Mohács and was inseparably intertwined with the trauma of the country's partition into three parts.¹²

All this has since changed, and historical research has proved that John Szapolyai cannot be regarded the primary cause of the painful strokes of fate that hit Hungary in the 16th century. He can rather be seen as a scapegoat, due not least to the successful political propaganda of his enemy, King Ferdinand,¹³ which caused the public opinion of King John (and his family) to turn increasingly negative with time. The initially popular ruler gradually became a dark figure of Hungarian history. This process is presented below.

THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

“John ... was a deeply Christian-spirited prince with great talent and unique wisdom, who also obtained outstanding experience in military matters.” If only this much information had been left for prosperity about King John, the

11 Radu Lupescu, *Vajdahunyad vára a Hunyadiak korában*. PhD Dissertation, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities. Budapest, 2006, 3.

12 Pál Fodor, ‘Örök Mohács. Gondolatok a mohácsi csatáról és következményeiről’, *Rubicon* 30:1 (2020) 10–19; Gergely Tóth, ‘Bűnbakképzés és propaganda. Az 1526. évi török hadjárat és a mohácsi csata a kora újkori történetírásban’, in Pál Fodor and Szabolcs Varga (eds.), *Több mint egy csata: Mohács. Az 1526. évi ütközet a magyar tudományos és kulturális emlékezetben*. (Mohács 1526–2026: Reconstruction and Remembrance) Budapest, 2019, 75–149.

13 On Habsburg mythopoetics in connection with Johannes Cuspinianus: Tóth, ‘Bűnbakképzés és propaganda’, 82. On John's being a scapegoat: Szabolcs Varga, ‘Katalin király és a török szultán. Mérlegen Szapolyai János árulásai’, *Korunk* 25:11 (2014) 5–12.

perception of the family would certainly have been different.¹⁴ We know that this was not the case, because, almost immediately after his coronation, King John had to face allegations formulated by writers opposing him, who either concealed his existence, like Cuspinianus,¹⁵ or claimed, like Paulus Iovius (Paolo Giovio), that he was openly happy about the death of his king. The memoirs of György Szerémi contains the complete list of the sins committed by the Szapolyais:¹⁶ István Szapolyai played dirty and killed King Matthias, and received the Eucharist under false pretences; John, on the other hand, felt resentful and betrayed both his country and his king, and years before the Battle of Mohács he had made an agreement with Ibrahim Pasha, and in 1526 did everything in his power to make sure the Ottomans would win.¹⁷ He was regarded as a ‘cowardly King Cathlene’ – there could hardly be any bigger insult than this in a society built on bravery and masculine bravado.¹⁸ Szerémi’s text is nothing but the voice of the masses, and it must have been written after King John’s death. The ill-willed author did not have to hold himself back, not even for fear of punishment, but this does not mean he can be ignored. The most far-fetched stories must have been circulating in the Carpathian basin, and these intensified as King John’s power weakened. An example is his secret meeting with Ibrahim, which is also mentioned by the unknown author of the work *Memoria rerum*.¹⁹ Yet even this excessively negative text paints an ambivalent picture of King John, and the reason for the criticism may first and foremost have been his failed royal governance. At least this is what Szerémi referred to when he wrote: “As voivode he was brave and careful, and he was prudent in dealing with various matters, but as king he did not dare to do anything, and became rather fearful. We were all amazed that Almighty God had taken away his valour.”²⁰ From all this it follows that 1. the general aversion against John intensified during the civil war against Ferdinand, and writers campaigning in favour of Ferdinand are likely to have played a major role in this. 2. After beginning with great expectations, many people perceived John’s reign as a failure, and this disappointment was the reason for the increasingly, if not excessively negative opinion of him. 3. Some contemporaries had a much more positive opinion of Szapolyai, but that image has since completely faded away. How these related to each other and how they were connected in time can only be reconstructed after a more thorough investigation.

14 Antal Verancsics, ‘Péter moldvai vajda elűzése (1538)’, translation and notes by Éva Gyulai in *Gesta* 7:1 (2007) 52.

15 Tóth, ‘Bűnbakképzés és propaganda’, 78.

16 *Ibid.*, 95, 111, 113, 114–117.

17 Szerémi, *Emlékirat*, 25–26, 29, 82, 120.

18 *Ibid.*, 142: *Vere bene nominaverat eum Georgius Siculus Cathalin vaida sub Sarno, quando, cum suo fratre sagardabat versus Nandor-Albam. Nunc est katalin kiral. Nos existimabamus, quod esset bonus pastor campi, ut defenderet agnelos a lupibus. Sub molli pastore lupus lanam cacat.*

19 *Memoria rerum*, 25.

20 *Tempore vaivodatu suo erat strenuus et curans, et velox in causis pergebat; haud in Regietate sua nil ausus erat, sed tremulus erat. Nos admirabamur, quod Deus omnipotens acceperat ab hoc strenuitatem suam.* Szerémi, *Emlékirat*, 144.

On the basis of contemporary memories and historiographical texts regarding John, even an image of a good king could be presented. His time as voivode of Transylvania is a clear success story,²¹ one that has visibly been commemorated on a beautifully adorned door-frame in a house in Kolozsvár, built according to tradition by the city as a sign of its gratitude. The inscription read as follows: “To his lordship voivode John Zápolya, in times of crusades, the lucky winner, Bernárd the painter. 1514.”²² He was the most successful Hungarian military leader, one who victoriously defended the province entrusted to him and lead campaigns south of the Carpathians several times. His contemporaries could thus hardly have been shocked when János Statileo erected, on his orders, John Hunyadi’s tomb stone in Gyulafehérvár in 1533.²³ By this, Szapolyai wished openly to demonstrate to the public the continuation of the politics of the Hunyadis, and to exploit the growing popularity of the cult of Matthias. In a better age John could even have become a new Matthias.

The source that best describes John’s personality is a memoir written posthumously in Hungarian. The identity of the author remains uncertain,²⁴ but most likely he was Catholic. Throughout the work the figure of the “god-fearing and humble King John”, who enjoyed great popularity among his people, is treated with deep respect. According to his description, when the people of Buda caught sight of the pregnant Isabella, many of them exclaimed: “May God give our Hungarian homeland a Hungarian prince, so we will not be dependent on another nation and Hungarian blood will not die out.”²⁵ This overt expression of emotion cannot have been a fantasy or some hollow phrase; John’s court was indeed filled with some kind of Scythian consciousness, which fitted well with classical Latin erudition. This is proved by the numerous charters of ennoblement which contain some concrete references to this, and which were issued by King John’s chancery.²⁶ The highly literate King John, who could recite Virgil from memory, had a court that was in many aspects a continuation of Matthias’s, and as such it was, in all likelihood, a conscious opposition to the ‘foreign’ royal household of the Jagiellonian courts, where German and Bohemian features dominated. Many who had previously suffered real or perceived injustice must have contemplated

21 See Norbert C. Tóth’s essay in the present volume.

22 Albert Zsolt Jakab, *Emlékkállítás és emlékezési gyakorlat. A kulturális emlékezet reprezentációi Kolozsváron*. PhD Dissertation, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities. Budapest, 2011, 92.

23 Ágnes Ritoókné Szalay, ‘Üzenet a kövön. A gyulafehérvári Hunyadi János-síremlék mint politikai manifesztum’, in Eadem, *Kutak. Tanulmányok a XV–XVI. századi magyarországi művelődés köréből*. (Humanizmus és Reformáció, 33.) Budapest, 2012, 166–174.

24 László Makkai, ‘Utószó’, in *Mindszenti Gábor diáriuma öreg János király haláláról*. Budapest, 1977, 26. There were some rumours in later times that the text might be a forgery, but more recent research contradicts this, and therefore it is considered genuine. On this, see Sándor Fazekas, ‘Ez szomorú gyász hír megvitelére’. *Mindszenti Gábor emlékiratáról*, *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 107:2–3 (2003) 243–260.

25 *Mindszenti Gábor diáriuma*, 6.

26 Gábor Barta, ‘Humanisták I. János király udvarában’, in Ágnes R. Várkonyi (ed.), *Magyar reneszánsz udvari kultúra*. Budapest, 1987, 200–201.

this with great satisfaction. It is no coincidence that the author of the diary wrote that “the king, his majesty, is loved by young and old, who feel sorry for his ill health”.²⁷ Before he left for Buda, he “spoke in a friendly way to the masses who had gathered around him to see him off on his journey”.²⁸ A similar sentiment was expressed when the news of the birth of the heir apparent spread in Szászsebes (Sebes): “That day there was great joy in the city and in the camp, because the people loved the humble king, our majesty.”²⁹ At the same time King John showed a great deal of mercy when he pardoned the rebellious Saxons, saying that “we cannot repudiate them, let them have mercy”.³⁰ Like Matthias, John knew his people very well: “These masses were the same before; they bend with whatever wind blows; the Turks come one today, they kiss their caftans, the Hungarians come the next day, they fawn over them; and they bless the Germans, should they come the day after next; they only seek their own good, and they would even deny their own homeland, if it proved necessary.”³¹ Had any work containing the king’s words of wisdom been compiled, this quote would certainly have been included in it.

We can rightly consider the diary of scribe Gábor as merely the expression of a biased intellectual’s thoughts, yet he was not alone in his opinion of King John. Another chronicler of the age, János Zermegh, also accepted King John unconditionally, respected his person and used the following adjectives to describe him: *mitis, christianus, bonus princeps*.³² András Farkas also wrote positively about King John in his poem from 1538, entitled *A zsidó és a magyar nemzetről* (On the Jewish and the Hungarian Nations): according to his prophecies, the divine retribution that had fallen on Hungary would only be lifted if the lords sided with the “humble king”.³³

It is very interesting that the monarch, who remained Catholic throughout his life, was characterized by the Protestant Gáspár Heltai in his novel entitled *A Háló* (The Net), written in connection with the religious debate of 1538, as the “great King John ... of blessed memory”, who was “humble and witty”.³⁴ According to the story, the king even encouraged the preachers as follows: “Have no fear! I have also got into my mind that the science of master Stephen is true and that the papacy is nothing! But there is nothing I can do against the lords. Yet I will find a way.”³⁵ In light of the above, the adjectives ‘humble’ and ‘god-fearing’ used to characterize the king cannot be regarded as examples of *epitheton ornans*; we have to accept that this really was how these authors saw the king.

27 *Mindszenti Gábor diáriuma*, 7.

28 *Ibid.*, 12.

29 *Ibid.*, 20.

30 *Ibid.*, 17.

31 *Ibid.*, 15–16.

32 Makkai, ‘Utószó’, 35.

33 *Ibid.*, 37.

34 Gáspár Heltai, *Háló*. (Millenniumi Könyvtár) Budapest, 2000, 34.

35 *Ibid.*, 32.

We know that at the respective courts of Transylvanian prince Stephen Báthory (1571–1586) and the king of Poland (1576–1586) there was a certain nostalgia for the Szapolyais. According to the Jesuit István Szántó (Arator), supported by the Catholic prince, King John was the only legitimate king of Hungary after the Battle of Mohács.³⁶ This thought was then taken up by the Saxon Christian Schesaeus, who, alongside Miklós Zrínyi, praised King John II the most, in his poem entitled *Ruinae Pannonicae*.³⁷ This trend was then further reinforced by Gian Michele Brutus, whose aim was to prove the pro-Ottoman character of the politics of the Szapolyais,³⁸ and by his followers, namely Johannes Bocatius, who also accepted the alliance with the Ottomans,³⁹ and István Szamosközy, who believed that it was pro-Habsburg János Zsámboky who “although King John did not deserve it, marked his name with the stigma of evil sin”.⁴⁰ The long list of 16th-century works praising John could be continued, and research must find ways to do exactly this in the next couple of years.⁴¹ Yet the data mentioned so far will perhaps suffice to demonstrate that a positive experience did exist in connection with King John. It has just not become part of Hungarian historical memory. We can accept the word of László Makkai, who believed that “there can hardly be any doubt that it was not so much Szapolyai’s deeds during his life (e.g. defeating the Székelys and the peasants, his alliance with the Ottomans, the Gritti affair, etc.) that cast a dark shadow on his memory in the public mind, but rather the occupation of Buda by the Ottomans in 1541, in which he did not actually play a direct role, but, many people believed he had paved the way for it to happen.”⁴² Of his varied career path, posterity used what it pleased. This is why outstanding historian Emma Bartoniek used the following fragments of the very same texts to describe him: “a coward and weak, but ruthless and bloody man, who was only afraid of hurting powerful lords.”⁴³ There are three reasons for this distortion. First, the country of the Szapolyais, and thus the family’s space of memory gradually narrowed to the territory of the Principality of Transylvania. Second, by the end of the 16th century at the latest, the dangers of the Szapolyais’ pro-Ottoman

36 Tamás Kruppa, *Tradíció és propaganda keresztútján. Fejezetek Báthory Zsigmond udvarának kultúrájából*. Budapest, 2015, 32.

37 Christianus Schesaeus, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*. (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Medii Recentisque Aevorum. Series Nova, 4.) Ed. Franciscus Csonka. Budapest, 1979.

38 Ferenc Toldy (ed.), *Brutus János Mihály m. kir. történetíró magyar históriája, 1490–1552. Vols. I–III*. (Monumenta Hungariae Historica, II; Scriptores, 12–14.) Pest, 1863–1876.

39 Johannes Bocatius, *Hungaroteutomachia – Magyarémetharc*. Published by Kees Teszelszky and Gergely Tóth. Budapest, 2014, 193–195.

40 *Nec audiendus est in hic Sambucus quoque ille semiteuto, patriarum historiarum teredo, qui innocenti regis Joannis nomini nefarii sceleris notam, nullo eius merito impingit*. Quoted in Mihály Balázs and István Monok, ‘Történetírók Báthory Zsigmond udvarában’, in R. Várkonyi (ed.), *Magyar reneszánsz udvari kultúra*, 254.

41 An example of this is the poetry of Mihály Verancsics and Sebestyén Tinódi.

42 Makkai, ‘Utószó’, 41.

43 Emma Bartoniek, *Fejezetek a XVI–XVII. századi magyarországi történetírás történetéből*. Budapest, 1975, 90.

politics had become clear to everybody, so recalling the circumstances of the establishment of the principality seemed inappropriate, even within its borders. An alliance with the Ottoman Empire was not consistent with any of the new political-theological slogans of the turn of the century (Protestant concordance and Christian Union).⁴⁴ Third, the Hungarian historiography of the 17th century was predominantly Catholic and Habsburg in spirit, with no room for rhetoric glorifying the Szapolyais.

The most important historiographical work written in the Carpathian basin in the early modern period is undoubtedly Miklós Istvánffy's work on the history of the Hungarians, which had a fundamental impact on the view of history in Hungary.⁴⁵ The stories found in the work have almost come to form part of Hungarian folklore, and it is thanks to Istvánffy that the period of the 16th-century siege wars has become a period of utmost importance in Hungarian national memory.

Being a clever humanist thinker, Istvánffy systematically collected various sources and complemented them with data and stories he knew from hearsay. Yet the characterization he provided in connection with the Szapolyais was not *sine ira et studio*. In the absence of a critical publication, a comprehensive analysis is still awaited. Nevertheless, a short summary can be provided. When writing about the family's rise, Istvánffy relied first and foremost on Antonio Bonfini, and initially expressed negative views of palatine István because of his relationship with queen consort Beatrice. Later on in his work he gave an account of the palatine's last years but without any particular assessment of the period. Concerning John, he stressed from the very beginning his desire to obtain the throne (*dominandi libido*), and his wish to conceal this desire. According to him, John lived under the spell of power, and his sinful plans would eventually lead to the destruction of the country.⁴⁶ Yet, in connection with the occurrences of 1514, we are presented with the picture of a careful voivode: John acts in the interest of his homeland; he is recruiting an army and provides timely support to István Báthori, the *ispán* of Temes (*comes Temesiensis*). Even when describing the period of retaliations, it is his honesty rather than his cruelty that is mentioned. All this remained without any consequences, however, because success only made John's personality even worse. Taking the extreme glorification he received from the masses at face value, he planned a plot against his king; in his pursuit of glory he attacked the castle of Zsarnó (Žarnov/Havale) in 1515, but suffered a miserable defeat at the hands of the Ottoman army.⁴⁷ The secret quest for power is a thread that runs through his entire life and defines

44 On this, see among others the works of Pál Thúri and Albert Szenci Molnár: Imre Mihály, 'Szenci Molnár Albert „Idea Christianorum”-a', in Béla Varjas (ed.), *Irodalom és ideológia a 16–17. században*. (Memoria Saeculorum Hungariae, 5.) Budapest, 1987, 235.

45 Istvánffy, *Historiarum de rebus*; Gábor Nagy, 'Szapolyai István és János alakja Istvánffy *Historiae*jában', in József Bessenyei, Zita Horváth and Péter Tóth (eds.), *Tanulmányok Szapolyai Jánosról és a kora újkori Erdélyről*. (Studia Miskolcinsensia, 5.) Miskolc, 2004, 195.

46 Nagy, 'Szapolyai István és János alakja', 198.

47 *Ibid.*, 201; see Norbert C. Tóth's essay in the present volume.

all his actions. Interestingly, in connection with the military preparations in 1526, Szapolyai is once again depicted in a favourable light: he is described as a man who does everything in his power to defend the province. It appears that at this point Istvánffy takes Brodarics's side in recounting events: he does not even mention the usual allegations regarding John's betrayal and his intentionally being late for the battle. Yet the defeat changed everything, as immediately upon the death of King Louis he set out to obtain the throne. The portrayal of characters in Istvánffy's work is rather interesting. It is not Ferdinand who is lifted to counterbalance the figure of John. Instead, John's supporters Kristóf Frangepán and Ferenc Bodó are praised, and it is their loyalty and valour that is put as an example to follow. Regarding the alliance with the Ottoman sultan, the writer mentions that this was a beneficial step for John, but a tragic one for Christianity. From this point onwards, events are related from a distance. An extremely negative assessment of the family is given in connection with the death of John II in 1571, as, according to the author, the reason John II was unable to rule and was unworthy of the throne was queen consort Isabella's inappropriate way of educating her child.⁴⁸ These adjectives and phrases will, as we shall see later, reappear in characterisations from subsequent periods.

Before moving on to the next century, a mention has to be made of another piece written in the 17th century, but which did not have a major impact on the image of the Szapolyais until its publication in 1782: in the 1670s Farkas Bethlen wrote a history of Transylvania from 1526 to 1609. Bethlen drew upon a massive source base, presenting the events from the point of view of the Szapolyais and attributing many statements to John.⁴⁹ According to him, John Szapolyai never wanted to obtain royal power, and, since he abhorred marriage and only married in 1539 at the instigation of his councillors, he cannot be accused of breaching the Treaty of Várad.⁵⁰ In the part that describes the king's death, he portrays the king in an especially beautiful way. By quoting Brutus, he mentions that, although the king's ancestors were all high-born, the king shone with his virtue and character. From a young age he was prudent, and displayed the spiritual grandeur necessary to help him live through weal and woe.⁵¹ Then, following Ambrus Somogyi, who worked in the early 17th century, he continued: John was calm, gentile and fair, and lacked the vehemence so characteristic of the Hungarians. He was characterized by a desire for knowledge and sound prudence; he was careful and vigilant, and in private he was learned and humane.

48 *Ibid.*, 212.

49 Wolffgangi de Bethlen, *Historia de rebus Transylvanicis. Vols. I–II. Cibinii*, 1782.

50 *Regnum, quod sibi deferrent, se quidem nunquam concupivisse. Bethlen, Historia*, I. 44. *Abhorreret a nuptiis, precibus tamen Procerum Pannoniae coelibatum abrumpere suadentium ad ineundum conjugium urgebatur...* *Ibid.*, 274.

51 *Ibid.*, 324: *Joannes Rex illustri per omnes Majores prosapia oriundus, fed virtutis et ingenii laudibus omni nobilitate clarior; enim in illo Joannis a primis adolescentiae annis indoles enituit, ut et Regis. in recte sentiendo prudentia, et in faciendo animi celsitudo semper perluxerit, adeo ut tam in secundis quam in adversis rebus semper praesenti fortuna major fuerit habitus, semperque paratus, tam adverse fortunae grassantis in secufus excipere, quam secundæ fallacia gaudia contemnere.*

He kept saying that friends obtained through good deeds were his most precious treasure. This description reveals the image of a peaceful, well-educated and good-willed monarch. That Bethlen briefly quotes Istvánffy, according to whom John was a gentle, generous man who demonstrated a high level of integrity throughout his life and whose biggest sin was that he wished to reach his goals with Ottoman support, does little to damage this image.⁵² In Bethlen's work, John appears as a tragic hero who, because he was born under an unlucky star, was not able to show his real skills. According to Bethlen, the person was not evil, only the age in which he lived. He expressed this by putting these words in King John's mouth: "Not a single day was certain in my life; the end of one misfortune was only the beginning of the other."⁵³ Giving it more thought, this is likely to have been the real motto of the Szapolyais' rule. Yet Bethlen's work is a testimony to the fact that the cult of the Szapolyai dynasty still existed in Transylvania in the 17th century.

THE 18TH CENTURY

If the so-called 'Szapolyai tradition' ever existed in Hungarian historiography, only some sporadic data on it has come down to us from the 18th century.⁵⁴ The independence of the Principality of Transylvania, handed down by the Szapolyai family, ended in 1690, and the territory came under Habsburg rule. Well-educated Catholic historiographers usually avoided the prehistory of the territory, especially the ecclesiastical circumstances there.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it is perhaps not hopeless to try to draw some cautious conclusions.

I have chosen, somewhat arbitrarily, to deal with the works of three writers in greater detail. The first, in a chronological order, is Sámuel Timon, who, as a Jesuit monk, conducted serious scholarship in the early decades of the 18th century, and consciously strove to create a new historical synthesis. His work *Epitome chronologica rerum Hungaricarum*, which appeared in 1736 and dealt with the events of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1576, can be regarded

52 *Ibid.*, 324: Somogyi: *Fuit Joannes Rex miti clementique ingenio, et ad beneficentiam aequitatemque maxime propenso; aberat enim ab illo innata illa Hungaris ferocia militaris, cum litterarum studio, et multis utriusque fortunae casibus, nunquam virium impetu, sed accurata consilii ratione regetur. Ibid.*, 325: Istvánffy: *Joannem Regem fuisse in omni vita placido liberalique ingenio, ad ambitionem tamen prono, moribus autem inculpatis, praeterquam quod patrocínio Turcarum res suas promotum iverit.*

53 *Ibid.*, 271: *Nulla mihi dies secunda affulsit, unius mali finis prodromus erat futuri.*

54 For more recent coverage of the century's historiography in the scholarly literature, see István Soós, 'Felzárkózás vagy lemaradás? Történetírás a 18. századi Magyarországon', in Gergely Tóth (ed.), *Clio inter arma. Tanulmányok a 16–18. századi magyarországi történetírásról.* (Magyar Történelmi Emlékek, Értekezések) Budapest, 2014, 227–251. I hereby thank Zoltán Gőzsy and Gergely Tóth for their advice on the writing of this chapter.

55 On the self-censorship of Jesuits and after 1773, former Jesuits, see Gergely Tóth, 'Ex-jesuiták. Önkép, önreprezentáció és a rend 1773. évi megszüntetésének emléke Palma Károly Ferenc, Pray György és Katona István történeti munkáiban', in András Forgó and Zoltán Gőzsy (eds.), *Katolikus egyházi társadalom Magyarországon a 18. században.* (Pécsi Egyháztörténeti Műhely, 11.) Pécs, 2019, 411–427.

as the culmination of his oeuvre.⁵⁶ His family originated from Moravia, but he was born in Tornycs (Trenčianská Turná), near Trenčsén, so he saw the light of the day on a territory that had once belonged to the Szapolyai family. Despite this, he does not dwell upon the family's origin. Imre is first mentioned *in medias res*, in connection with the events in Bosnia in 1464, while István is introduced, following Bonfini, in relation to the military events of 1474. When recording the events of 1487, he wrote about Imre Szapolyai's death, the place of his burial and also the inscription on his tomb; the last of these he had seen with his own eyes.⁵⁷ The Jesuit scientist was interested in epigraphy, which may be the reason why, after praising the deceased István Szapolyai, he also recorded the epitaph on his tomb when he wrote the entry for the year 1499.⁵⁸ He mentions John in 1526 as a wealthy and influential noble (*vir opibus ac clientilis potens*), and explains the events of the royal election on the basis of Péter Révay's book *De Monarchia*, published in 1659.⁵⁹ Apart from this he also quotes from works by Miklós Istvánffy, Miklós Oláh, János Zsámboky and Gergely Petthő. According to him, the reason for Szapolyai's alliance with the sultan was simply that John was, during his exile in Poland, unable to give up his desire to become king,⁶⁰ and had found a suitable person, Hieronym Łaski, to represent his interests at the Porte. He recounts the events of the next couple of years without any accusations, in a well-balanced manner, and, as for the year 1539, he speaks of John as a real peacemaker, since he concluded a peace with both great powers, had the walls of Buda built, walls that continued to preserve his memory even in the 18th century.⁶¹ This is the point where John's portrayal reaches its culmination, yet the climax comes when John II's death in 1571 is mentioned, because with this the family, known since the times of King Sigismund and favoured by the Hunyadis, died out. Some regarded John as diligent, while others said he was lazy. Yet, everybody agreed that no one is able to act according to their knowledge if surrounded by filth and dirt.⁶² With this assessment Timon exonerated the Szapolyais, instead blaming the epoch for all the misery that occurred during their reign.

The most influential Hungarian historian of the 18th century was undoubtedly Matthias Bél, who in many aspects set the standard for upcoming generations. Bél wished to create a geographical and historical description of the country on

56 Samuel Timon, *Epitome chronologica rerum Hungaricarum et Transilvanicarum a nativitate divi Stephani primi regis apostolici, producta ad Annum MDCCXXXVI*. Claudiopoli, 1764².

57 *Ibid.*, 77–78, 85, 95.

58 *Ibid.*, 105; Árpád Mikó, 'Jagelló-kori reneszánsz sírkövekről', *Ars Hungarica* 14:1–2 (1986) 102.

59 Timon, *Epitome chronologica*, 119–120; Gergely Tóth, 'Lutheránus országtörténet újszoitokus keretben. Révay Péter Monarchiája', in *Idem* (ed.), *Clio inter arma*, 128–129.

60 *Non potuit tamen Joannes cupiditati suas imperare, quin magis magisque ad regnum aspiraret*. Timon, *Epitome chronologica*, 123.

61 *Joannes Rex reconciliato sibi Solymano, et pace aliqua cum Domo Auftriacá facta, Budense castrum muniebat. Reliquitque memoriam sui in muris, quorum aliqui hodie supersunt.* *Ibid.*, 145.

62 *Alii Joannem hebetis ingenii, alii acris fuisse ajunt; sed in ganeis et sordibus, educatum, nihil suo gradu dignum egisse, consentiunt.* *Ibid.*, 233.

the basis of the methods of German theories of the state.⁶³ He had a primary interest in geography, but, as an outstanding scholar, he was in fact interested in everything. The story he told of how Szapolyai received the castle of Trencsén for his bravery demonstrated in the Bohemian war was essentially based on Bonfini's account.⁶⁴ When describing the events after the Battle of Mohács, he chose not to enter into a deep analysis of John's kingship, yet, on the basis of the work of Istvánffy, he gave a detailed account of the siege and occupation of Trencsén by Ferdinand's troops.⁶⁵

Similar data can be found also in Matthias Bél's manuscript written about the county of Sáros and published first a couple of years earlier.⁶⁶ He noted that since Sáros was Péter Perényi's estate, after he switched sides it came under John Szapolyai's jurisdiction, and it was only after a long siege that Leonhard von Vels was able to retake it for King Ferdinand.⁶⁷ The entry on the castle of Munkács (Mukachevo) reveals that in one part of the upper castle, where the apartments of the garrison officers and priests were located, the rooms were decorated with paintings of the Rákóczi, Szapolyai and Zrínyi families, which may be somewhat surprising.⁶⁸ Knowing the history of the castle, it is not so striking that the Zrínyi and Rákóczi families are mentioned. It is however less known that the castle was occupied by King John for a brief period in 1528. After a series of changes in ownership, it came into the possession of Péter Petrovics in 1551, and was then inherited from him by John II.⁶⁹ Looking at it from the perspective of the remembrance of the Szapolyais, that visitors were able to see a composition of the Zrínyi, Rákóczi and Szapolyai families at the same time and at the same place must have been interesting. All this means that some form of regional cult of the Szapolyai family did exist at the end of the 18th century.

In the late 18th century, it was mostly Károly Wagner who conducted research into the Szapolyai family. Wagner was very much influenced by Matthias Bél's collection on Szepes county, *Historia comitatus Scepusiensis*, which provided a

63 Gergely Tóth, 'Vestigia barbarae gentis: Mátyás Bél on Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Hungary', in Pál Fodor and Pál Ács (eds.), *Identity and Culture in Ottoman Hungary*. (Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur der Türkvölker, 24.) Berlin, 2017, 367–369.

64 Matthias Bel, *Notitia Hungariae novae historico geographica... Comitatum ineditorum tomus primus, in quo continentur... Comitatus Arvensis et Trencsiniensis*. Ed. by Gergely Tóth in collaboration with László Glück and Zoltán Gőzsy. Budapest, 2011, 271–277.

65 *Ibid.*, 277.

66 Matthias Bel, *Notitia Hungariae novae historico geographica... Comitatum ineditorum tomus quintus, in quo continentur... Comitatus Sarosiensis, Zempliniensis, Ungváriensis et Bereghiensis*. Ed. by Gergely Tóth in collaboration with Bernadett Benei, Zoltán Gőzsy and Rezső Jarmalov. Budapest, 2018.

67 *Ibid.*, 69.

68 *Partem superiorem commendans arcis, cuius conclave iconibus familiae Rákoczy, Zapolyai, Zrinyi, affabre pictis superbit. Ibid.*, 329. The text dates back only to the early 19th century at the earliest, so must be a later insertion.

69 *Ibid.*, 331; also see XVI. századi uradalmi utasítások. *Utasítások a kamarai uradalmak prefektusai, udvarbírái és ellenőrei részére. Vol. II.* (Fons Könyvek, 2.) Edited and introductory essay by István Kenyeres. Budapest, 2002, 451–452.

very detailed description of the area,⁷⁰ but while Bél's interest in geography defined his view of history, Wagner was interested in history only. In archival sources, Wagner was looking for past events, and placed the individual at the centre in his work on the Szepesség region, as well.⁷¹ In his writings he placed special emphasis on the genealogy of certain families; for this reason, his work was very popular in the upcoming decades. Iván Nagy methodically used his findings in his work on family history;⁷² Jeromos Bal also referred to him in his writings on the history of Szepes county.⁷³ Alongside the history of the Thurzó, Thököly and Varkocs families, the fourth volume of Wagner's work also contains the history of the Szapolyai family, which has become the most famous collection of information on the family.⁷⁴

Wagner mentioned the family's origin in Pozsega county on the basis of charters and of notes from Hans Dernschwam.⁷⁵ The latter wrote about the Szapolyais in a rather hostile manner, and this hostility also found its way into Wagner's work. Like him, Wagner also made repeated mention of the pro-Ottoman attitude of the family.⁷⁶ When presenting Imre Szapolyai, he mentioned that he founded a Pauline monastery in the city of Tokaj in 1476.⁷⁷ When giving an account of his death, he published the entire letter written by the family's servitor Pál Isép to the city of Bártfa.⁷⁸ As regards István, he emphasized his generosity and his military experience,⁷⁹ only a few lines later to accuse him of poisoning Matthias when he was captain of Vienna.⁸⁰ He then continued the list of István's sins: he stole a large part of Matthias's treasury, and some of the dishes with the raven insignia could be found in King John's possession as much as four decades later. To this he added that as all accusations came from Hans Dernschwam, who in several instances wrote negatively about the Szapolyai family, he could not imagine that palatine István would treat his royal benefactor in such a way. It was more likely, wrote the historian, that these objects, marked with the coat of arms of the royal family, came into the

70 Matthias Bel, 'Historia comitatus Scepusiensis', in Idem, *Hungariae antiquae et novae prodromus cum specimen*. Norimbergae, 1723, 69–124.

71 Carolus Wagner, *Analecta Scepusii sacri et profane. Vols. I–IV*. Viennae, 1774–1778. On Wagner's works most recently: Kornélia Szőke, *Genealogia variabilis. Tanulmány a genealógia műfajairól a Thurzó-család példáján*. PhD Dissertation, Miskolc University, Faculty of Humanities. Miskolc, 2017.

72 Szőke, *Genealogia*, 105.

73 Jeromos Bal, *Szepesvára története*. (A Szepesmegyei Történelmi Társulat Évkönyve, 13.) Lőcse, 1914.

74 Wagner, *Analecta*, IV. 1–46.

75 Hans Dernschwam, *Erdély, Besztercebánya, Törökországi útinapló*. (Bibliotheca Historica) Translated and published by Lajos Tardy. Budapest, 1984, 112.

76 On this, see Tibor Neumann's essay on the rise of the family in the present volume.

77 The building of the monastery was found in the 1960s: Zoltán Ribáry and Tibor Joó, 'A tokaji páloskolostor nyomában', *A Miskolci Herman Ottó Múzeum Közleményei* 6 (1964) 49–53.

78 Wagner, *Analecta*, IV. 16–17.

79 *Ibid.*, 19.

80 *Matthiam fuisse Viennae ab ipso Stephano veneno sublatum. Ibid.*, 20. True, he noted in the footnotes that according to other historians the murder was carried out by István Báthori.

possession of the Szapolyai family as a result of John Corvinus's benevolence. Wagner also cleared Szapolyai of the accusations concerning his surrender of Vienna, reasoning that he had done so for the good of the country,⁸¹ and it was for the same reason that he had actively supported the election of Vladislaus as king.

Having presented István, he turned to some of the female members of the family and then to John's life. At the very outset he remarked that there was uncertainty concerning his date of birth: according to Paul Eber he was born on 29 March 1490, whereas Farkas Bethlen stated that he died in 1540 at the age of 53.⁸² On the basis of the works of Istvánffy and Péter Révay, it was this latter view that gained ground in scholarly literature, despite Eber's opinion being the more probable. Regarding the place of John's birth, Wagner corrected Bél, who believed John was born in Trencsén,⁸³ and published the anecdote according to which István told his son: "if only you were older, I would make you king!"⁸⁴ The story is attributed to the Polish humanist Jan Łaski and is meant to demonstrate the family's ambitions. For the later years of John's life, once again, Wagner's main source was Dernschwam, and the main concern is the process by which the royal throne was obtained. Since the German humanist and trader clearly had a hostile attitude towards the Szapolyais, there is no question that Wagner's choice of source had a great impact on his assessment of the family. His wording on the period after the Battle of Mohács is surprisingly brief. By relying on archival sources, he proved that John was not crowned by Pál Várday, archbishop of Esztergom, but rather by István Podmaniczky, bishop of Nyitra (Nitra). He avoided any reference to John's alliance with the Ottomans and instead briefly mentioned the Treaty of Várad and subsequently John's death and reburial in 1543. As for Isabella, he stated that the characterizations that can be read of her in various works differ greatly. Then, finally, on the basis of the works of Istvánffy and Forgách, he gave a short summary on John Sigismund, but distorted his physical appearance, describing him as a person with thin calves, a thin, reddish beard, and a sad face. True, on the last page of the family history, the eulogy written of John II by Gian Michele Brutus eases the tone, so the reader can in fact also find something positive about the last Szapolyai.⁸⁵

This short overview does not cover all aspects of the subject; many other writers and works could be included in more comprehensive research. The aim of this study has only been to present the way the Szapolyai family was remembered during the birth of Hungarian academic historiography. As we have seen, of all the existing historical texts, those written by pro-Habsburg writers, especially by Istvánffy, were more commonly used. Despite this, a broad palette of voices had been passed down to the next generation of writers.

81 *non tam periculi impendentis metu, quam patrie, cui se servare voluit, studio, Vienna descensit. Ibid., 22.*

82 *Ibid., 33; Paulus Eber, Calendarium historicum. Vittebergae, 1573. 123, quoted in Tibor Neumann's essay in the present volume.*

83 Bél, *Historia comitatus Scepusiensis*, 100.

84 *de creando novo Rege ageretur, filium suum Joannem "adhuc infautem complexum dixisse: Si tantulus esses Fili (modo corporis paulo majore ostenso) nunc Rex Hungaria esses". Wagner, Analecta, IV. 34.*

85 *Ibid., 43, 45.*

THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

The 19th-century practitioners of the new professional Hungarian historiography – whose thinking was no longer dependent on any particular religious denomination – set themselves the primary goal of actively participating in building a nation. The language of the texts also changed, with these new works mostly published in Hungarian. Historians and literary authors were more and more intensely attracted to the subject of the Battle of Mohács, with the opinion strengthening that it was the fatal turning point for the powerful Kingdom of Hungary, derailed after King Matthias's death in 1490, to head into decline and disintegration.⁸⁶ Inevitably, the tone of scholarly and literary works written about the Szapolyai family members, first of all King John, as protagonists of this age, likewise grew more and more sombre.

The change in outlook is well illustrated by *A Magyarokhoz* (To the Hungarians), an ode by Dániel Berzsenyi, in which Szapolyai was already linked to the bloody storm clouds of war of the 16th and 17th centuries. The poet praises his nation: “You did survive the murderous century of Zápolya / the secret assassins' hands / while you stood firm / amidst the flames of family blood-feuds in retribution.”⁸⁷ More straightforward is the opinion of the age in a poem by another early 19th-century poet, Sándor Kisfaludy, entitled *Somló*, in which John Szapolyai already appears in contrast to John Hunyadi: “The fateful hour arrives / amidst roars and screams / And the fine land of Hungarians is uprooted! / For Louis gets killed at Mohács / like Vladislaus at Varna; / and Zápolya – not Hunyadi – / has his eye on the throne – from behind.”⁸⁸

Károly Kisfaludy's poem *Mohács* is a milestone in this process, even though contemporaries were unaware of it.⁸⁹ Its motifs were not brand new, since domestic strife had already been blamed for the defeat at Mohács in earlier works, for example in the epic poem *Magyar gyász* (Hungarian Grief) by Márton

86 Pál S. Varga, ‘...keresetek alkalmat a hajdanra visszatekinteni...’ Mohács emlékezethelyé válása a 19. század elejének magyar irodalmában, in Pál S. Varga, Orsolya Száraz and Miklós Takács (eds.), *A magyar emlékezethelyek kutatásának elméleti és módszertani alapjai*. (Locī Memoriae Hungaricae, 2.) Debrecen, 2013, 244–249. On all this, most recently, see Tibor Neumann, Norbert C. Tóth and Tamás Pálosfalvi, ‘Két évszázad a sztereotípiák fogságában. Helyzetkép a Jagelló-kor kutatásáról’, in Fodor and Varga (eds.), *Több mint egy csata*, 11–73; János B. Szabó, ‘A mohácsi csata a modern kori történetírásban’, in *ibid.*, 339–340.

87 *Nem fojthatott meg Zápolya öldöklő / Százdaja, 's titkos gyilkosaid keze / A' szent rokon vérbe ferősztő / Visszavonás tüze közt megálltál*, English translation: Adám Makkai, https://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/Berzsenyi_D%C3%A1niel-1776/A_magyarokhoz_%28I%29. Gábor Vaderna, *A költészet születése. A magyarországi költészet társadalomtörténete a 19. század első évtizedeiben*. Budapest, 2017, 411, 425.

88 *Eljött zúgva és ordítva / A sors vészes órája, / S kihányatik sarkaiból / A magyar szép hazája! / Mert Mohácsnál elvész Lajos, / Mint Ulászló Várnánál; / És Zápolya – nem Hunyady – / Trónust les és – hátul áll.* Sándor Kisfaludy, *Somló*, stanza 41.

89 András S. Laczkó, ‘Új nap, régi fény. Kisfaludy Károly Mohácsáról’, in Ágnes Hansági and Zoltán Hermann (eds.), *A két Kisfaludy. Tanulmányok*. (Tempevölgy Könyvek, 21.) Balatonfüred, 2016, 147–149; Idem, *Új nap, régi fény. Mohács a reformkori magyar lírában*. Pécs, 2019.

Etédi Sós,⁹⁰ but Kisfaludy's line "No! Not the enemy, her own son inflicted her wound (*Nem! Nem az ellenség, önfia vágta sebé!*)!" epitomized general opinion and determined the evaluation of the Szapolyais. King John and his family could not emerge well from the perspective of "Discordia", that is of feud and dissent, since it was during their reign that Buda got lost and the Hungarian Kingdom fell into pieces. What is more, the liberal 19th-century Hungarian nobility championing the cause of the liberation of serfs created a positive memory of the peasant rising of 1514, while John Szapolyai, who had the leader György Dózsa brutally executed, was mentioned with contempt as one who had put individual interest ahead of the interest of the nation and depraved his homeland with his megalomania.⁹¹

Neither did it contribute to a more favourable image of the Szapolyais that, alongside the Hungarian élite advocating national independence, those who were appreciative of the rule of the Habsburgs in Hungary also had an equally negative opinion of the family. After all, if the golden age was brought to the country by the Habsburgs, then King John crowned in opposition to them hindered the rise of the country. This idea was reinforced by György Szerémi's *Epistola de perditio regni Hungarorum*, published in 1840,⁹² replete with slanderous remarks about King John.

Following the defeat of the war of liberation in 1849, the image of the Habsburgs changed drastically in Hungary, and this had some influence on the evaluation of the Szapolyais. The Hungarian intellectuals in exile thought that, rather than bringing tranquillity, the Austrian dynasty further deepened the crisis brought by Matthias's death.⁹³ The authors of major syntheses along this line of thought, László Szalay⁹⁴ and Mihály Horváth, opined that it was not the domestic strife that caused the fall of the country, but conversely historical necessity that brought about the crowning of two kings. In their judgment, both the Ottomans and the Habsburgs were enemies, so they did not condemn the Szapolyais for trying to seek a solution out of this unfortunate situation with the sultan.⁹⁵ Of course, the historians were aware that in the given period, King John could not feature as a positive figure opposed to Ferdinand of Habsburg. This made them place

90 Márton Etédi Sós, *Magyar gyász; vagy-is Második Lajos Magyar Királynak a Mohácsi mezőn történt veszedelme*. Pest, 1792. More recently: Árpád Csonki, 'Etédi Sós Márton műve Mohácsról (1792)', in Fodor and Varga (eds.), *Több mint egy csata*, 259–279.

91 Orsolya Völgyesi, 'Erdély kérdése és a hazai nyilvánosság az 1830-as években', in Ferenc Hörcher, Mátyás Lajtai and Béla Mester (eds.), *Nemzet, faj, kultúra a hosszú 19. században Magyarországon és Európában*. (Magyar Történelmi Emlékek, Értekezések. Tanulmányok a Nacionalizmus Kultúrtörténetéből, 2.) Budapest, 2016, 187.

92 It was known that the work existed but its contents were not known. Jászay used it, which may have contributed to John's negative characterization: Zsolt Szebelédi, *Szerémi György Epistolájának nyelvi elemzése*. PhD Dissertation, Pázmány Péter Catholic University. Piliscsaba, 2017, 5.

93 In general, see Horváth, 'A 19. századi történetírás', 167–171.

94 László Szalay, *Magyarország története. Vol. IV. A mohácsi vésztől a lincai békekötésig 1526–1654*. Lipcse, 1854.

95 *Ibid.*, 77.

the emphasis on the wife and mother with a tragic fate, Isabella Jagiellon,⁹⁶ and discover new national heroes, Friar George (Martinuzzi) and the erudite humanist aristocrat Tamás Nádasdy.⁹⁷ Thus keeping a distance from King John remained unchanged during the dualist Monarchy, which also explains why his biography was written not by a scholarly historian but by a lawyer from Kolozsvár, Mihály Kőváry, in *Vasárnapi Újság* in 1861;⁹⁸ this is his only biography to this day.

Despite the enormous cultural transformation in Hungary over the 19th century, the assessment of the Szapolyais changed little. In vain did the intellectuals of the Reform Era turn with interest to Transylvania, the family who founded the independent principality did not receive a more positive evaluation in historiography or literature. The burgeoning cult of the defeat at Mohács and the increasingly ambivalent memory of the Habsburgs prevented John, Isabella or John II from coming closer to the Hungarian hall of fame. Of the three of them, perhaps Isabella fared best: in her, the society of reviled and widowed Hungarian noblewomen found its archetype. It is no accident that thanks to Endre Veress her biography was completed at the turn of the century.⁹⁹ John received a statue on the wall of the parliament, and in the plans of 1897 he was considered for inclusion in the sculpture gallery of the kings in Heroes' Square in Budapest, but eventually he was not found worthy and was replaced by the full-length statue of John Hunyadi.¹⁰⁰

After the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, the politics of memory painted an even darker picture of Hungarian history in the Ottoman era and the 16th century. It was self-evident to compare Mohács to Trianon, and all historical syntheses and political analyses pinpointed the primary source of the recent catastrophe in the age of the Jagiellons and Szapolyais.¹⁰¹ They held that it was factionalism, selfishness and discord that led both to the weakening of the sovereign's power in 1526 and to the disintegration of historical Hungary in 1920. At the same time, a nostalgia for Transylvania emerged, closely connected to the cult of Matthias Corvinus in Kolozsvár and to the romanticization of the period of the Hunyadis.¹⁰² However, the Szapolyais were again the losers in the reinterpretation of the tropes of the Hungarian national character.

There is no room to list all the literature on this theme, but whether we take the celebrated female author Irén Gulácsy's novel *Fekete vőlegények* (Black

96 Szabolcs Varga, 'A Szapolyaiak emlékezete', in Pál Fodor and Szabolcs Varga (eds.), *Egy elfeledett magyar királyi dinasztia: A Szapolyaiak*. Budapest, 2020, 358–359.

97 Mihály Horváth, *Gróf Nádasdy Tamás élete, némi tekintettel korára*. Buda, 1836; Idem, *Fráter György*. Pest, 1871.

98 Mihály Kőváry, 'Zápolya János király', *Vasárnapi Újság* 8 (1861) 313–315, 327–328, 338–340, 350–352, 363–365.

99 Endre Veress, *Izabella királyné (1519–1559)*. (Magyar Történeti Életrajzok) Budapest, 1901.

100 <https://intezet.nori.gov.hu/nemzeti-emlekhelyek/Budapest/hosok-tere/> (access date: 15.08.2020).

101 Gábor Kovács and Béla Mester, 'Mohács szerepe a modern magyar politikai eszmetörténetben', in Fodor and Varga (eds.), *Több mint egy csata*, 320–321.

102 See the chapter on a comparison with the Hunyadis.

Bridegrooms)¹⁰³ or Gyula Krúdy's trilogy of novels about 1526, we find a corrupt, lonely King John ill-suited to rule a country.¹⁰⁴

Gyula Szekfű wrote in a similar vein about the Szapolyais in the major historical synthesis of the age. The historian, who sympathized with the Habsburgs, claimed that "János Zápolya was the hero of illusions, tossed about by surges of moods. He was not responsible for the disaster of Mohács; his rival Ferdinand of Austria brought that charge against him without justification before his contemporaries and for centuries of history to come. Remorse did not weigh on his mind, King Louis's death was not his fault, and his own brother György Zápolya was also killed at Mohács, for whom he dressed in mourning."¹⁰⁵ Szekfű also attributed the reign of the Szapolyais to the decay that had set in during the Jagiellonian period: "That's how John's rule relapsed into the Middle Ages, when for lack of a strong central power the country disintegrated into parts, each only defending and caring for itself, and the central power became incapable of performing comprehensive tasks."¹⁰⁶

The evaluation of the Szapolyais did not change with the fall of the Horthy regime and the post-1945 emergence of the communist system. All that happened was to complement the decline from Matthias's death onwards with the ideology of the class struggle and the centuries-old myth of anti-Habsburg fighting for national independence. The indictment of two long centuries was drafted by István Nemeskürthy in the 1970s – the polemic it triggered is remembered as the Mohács debate in Hungarian historical studies.¹⁰⁷ The moot question was whether Hungary could have avoided the defeat at Mohács and the fall of the late medieval Hungarian state relying on herself alone, or whether the fate of the country already depended on the great powers. Although the dispute has not been ended with a convincing conclusion as yet, it now seems the Hungarian élite of this era, including the Szapolyais, did not bear full responsibility, for the intentions of the great powers of the time were decisive for the issue. This – not quite new – conclusion made a more balanced assessment of the age possible: András Kubinyi and his disciples have modified the historical evaluation of the Jagiellonian age in several regards,¹⁰⁸ and Gábor Barta has written fundamental works on the Szapolyais.¹⁰⁹ He was the first to stress the need to reinterpret the movement of 1514, he has explored the first months of King John's reign, and he has described the initial phases of the birth of the Transylvanian principality.

103 Irén Gulácsy, *Fekete vőlegények*. Budapest, 1927.

104 Gyula Krúdy, *Mohács*. Budapest, 1926; Idem, *Festett király*. Budapest, 1929; Idem, *Az első Habsburg*. Budapest, 1930; Anna Horváth, *Krúdy Gyula Mohács-trilógiája (Egy történelmi tényregény születése)*. PhD Dissertation, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities. Budapest, 2010, 109–111.

105 Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, *Magyar történet. Vol. III*. Budapest, 1935, 13 (the chapter was written by Gyula Szekfű).

106 Hóman and Szekfű, *Magyar történet*, III. 29.

107 B. Szabó, 'A mohácsi csata a modern kori történetírásban', 351–354. On the debate with further literature, see Vilmos Erős, 'Mohács-vita', *Magyar Szemle. Új Folyam* 23:5–6 (2014) 55–76.

108 Neumann, C. Tóth and Pálosfalvi, 'Két évszázad a sztereotípiák fogságában', 70–72.

109 'Barta Gábor publikációi', *Történelmi Szemle* 37:1 (1995) 123–128.

It is to him that we owe an adequate methodology for the pursuit of further research.

For the time being, the evaluation of the Szapolyais is somewhere between the stereotypes of the past and the new assessments of the present. In Transylvania, there was a real stir after 1990, and local Hungarian communities have been making efforts to cherish the memory of the Szapolyais and their age. This is a clearly positive development, and the historical investigations still going on may facilitate this process. It is still early to draw far-reaching conclusions from these signs, but now we have a chance to experience the return of the Szapolyais' cult to the point where it started in the 16th century.

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.

