

# General Historical Survey

## 1521-1525

During the later years of his reign Sultan Selim I was engaged militarily against the Safavid state in Iran and the Mamluk sultanate in Syria and Egypt, so Central Europe felt relatively safe. King Lajos II of Hungary was only ten years old when, in 1516, he succeeded to the throne and was placed under guardianship. In 1506 he had already been betrothed to Maria, the sister of Emperor Ferdinand, by the Pact of Wiener Neustadt, where a royal double marriage was arranged between the Habsburg and Jagiello dynasties. The government of Hungary was entrusted to a State Council, a group of men who were interested only in enriching themselves. In a word: the crown had been reduced to political insignificance; the country was in chaos, the treasury empty, the army virtually non-existent and the system of defence utterly neglected. This was the situation in Hungary when Sultan Selim I died (8/9 Şevvāl 926/21/22 September 1520) and was succeeded by Süleyman I, who would become known in the West as “Süleyman the Magnificent” and to the Ottomans as *Kānūnī* (“the Lawgiver”). He would rule for 46 years, waging war incessantly on many fronts, reaching the Persian Gulf in the south-east and Vienna and the headlands of the Tatra Mountains in the north-west. He would personally lead eleven full-scale campaigns into Hungary.

Süleyman I must have realized that Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) was the key to Hungary and to Central Europe, so it had to be taken first. And as a superb strategist he must also have understood that before striking into Central Europe he should secure his flanks, in this case his Aegean maritime flank where the Knights of St. John still constituted a formidable threat. So in 1520, immediately after he had assumed power, he first tested and showed off his own maritime forces in order to discourage any designs by the Knights Hospitaller. Thus, in preparation of his final blow against them he ordered to attack a small group of islands called after the largest, Kastelorizo, at the time ruled by Spain. Their capture was easily accomplished. The Sultan then sent an army into Bosnia against the fortress of Jajca, as a warning of Hungary. Süleyman subsequently sent an envoy to the court in Buda offering peace in exchange for vassal status with a yearly tribute. The haughty State Council did not even think it worthwhile to consider the proposal but put Süleyman’s envoy in jail, cut off his nose and ears and sent him back in this condition to his lord in Constantinople. Infuriated, Süleyman immediately started preparations for a large campaign in the following year.

In 1521 the Sultan ordered to continue his pressure on Bosnia and Dalmatia. Two army groups, one against Szabács and one against Belgrade and Zimony were then sent ahead while Süleyman followed with his main force. The fortress garrisons amounted to only 700 men in Belgrade, 500 in Szabács and 350 in Zimony. The Ottomans took all three fortresses; none of the defenders survived. Süleyman then had all three strongholds refortified and provided each with a permanent garrison. Then he returned to Constantinople. Thus the two main fortresses south of the Sava-Danube line and a bridgehead north of it, including the region of Sirmium were now in the hands of the Ottomans, opening up the soft underbelly of Hungary. These developments finally roused the king and government in Buda, and a Diet was convened. The royal couple were conducted to Székesfehérvár, where Lajos was declared to have come of age and Maria was crowned Queen of Hungary. The court returned to Buda where the official wedding was celebrated. In the meantime, Süleyman had turned his at-

tention to the Knights Hospitallers on Rhodes (which capitulated late in 1522 after a long siege).

## 1526-1530

Between 1523 and 1525 Süleyman and his Grand Vizier and favourite, Ibrahim Pasha (d. 942/1536), were chiefly engaged in settling the affairs of Egypt. His second campaign into Hungary, which was launched in April 1526, led ultimately, after a slow and difficult march, to a military encounter known as the first Battle of Mohács. It was fought on 20 Zilkade 932/29 August 1526 on the plain of Mohács, west of the Danube in southern Hungary, near the present-day intersection of Hungary, Croatia and Serbia. Both Süleyman and Lajos II participated in the battle, the forces involved being led on the Hungarian side by Pál Tomori, the Archbishop of Kalocsa, chief commandant of Lower Hungary, and on the Ottoman side by Ibrahim Pasha. The Ottoman force consisted of some 60,000 soldiers – frontier troops, janissaries and fief-holders (timariots). The Hungarian contingent has been estimated at 26,000 men. The first Hungarian attack caught the Ottomans off-guard, but they quickly recovered; within an hour-and-a-half, the Ottomans had completely defeated the Hungarian army, which lost all its leaders, including the king, either dead on the field or drowned in the marshes of the Csele stream. On 12 September Süleyman entered Buda, but soon thereafter retreated to Belgrade, bringing the Mohács campaign to a successful end. In a technical sense, Süleyman did not immediately add Hungary to the Ottoman Empire, keeping it as a personal possession instead (even after recognizing János Zápolya, the *voivoda* of Transylvania and head of the “native” party, as the King of Hungary).

The first Battle of Mohács was a turning-point in Hungarian history. The death of Lajos II without an heir led to an extensive period of political chaos while the territorial and strategic losses suffered (including the earlier loss of Szerémség (Sirmium)) made the country increasingly vulnerable.

After the disaster of Mohács the majority of the lower Hungarian nobility, assembled in Tokaj, proclaimed János Zápolya (r. 1526-1540) as king and planned an election Diet. The delegates convened in Székesfehérvár and, after having laid the recently recovered remains of King Lajos II to rest in his tomb, they opened the Diet. The agreement of 5 November 1521 between Ferdinand of Austria and Lajos was declared illegal and János Zápolya (John Zápolya) was elected King of Hungary and crowned right away by the bishop of Nyitra. In the meantime Ferdinand ordered the Palatine of Hungary, István Báthory, to convoke a Diet in Komárom for 30 November. Ferdinand, Lajos’s widow Maria, and the Palatine – the “German party” – could count on only little support and Komárom had in the meantime (16 December) been taken by Zápolya’s forces, so the “German Party’s Diet” had to be moved to Pozsony (Bratislava). Here a few delegates from the nobility, from some counties near the Austrian border, and from the cities of Pozsony and Sopron, elected Ferdinand their king. His coronation, however, had to be postponed because the crown was in the hands of Zápolya.

On 1 January 1527, the delegates from Croatia convened in Cetin (actually on Slavonian territory) and elected Ferdinand as their king. Five days later, the delegates from Slavonia, convened in Dombró, elected Zápolya their king.

King Zsigmond of Poland called representatives of both sides to Olmütz in a vain attempt at reconciliation. In these early months after Mohács virtually all of Hungary and Slavonia was in the hands of Zápolya, but he was unable to exploit this advantage. Ferdinand then declared war on Zápolya and entered Hungary with two armies. Zápolya retreated without putting up any resistance but failed to take the sacred crown of St. Stephen with him. And so Ferdinand entered Buda through open gates and sent his forces after Zápolya. This rapid advance and the 'gift' of Buda turned the tide in favour of Ferdinand. Zápolya was defeated in battle near Tokaj and at the same time Count Kristóf Frangepán, his great supporter, was killed in the siege of Varasd (Varaždin), which brought Slavonia under Ferdinand's control. While Zápolya withdrew further east to Nagyvárad and thence to Transylvania, Ferdinand convened a Diet in Buda.

On 3 October 1527 Ferdinand was again elected King, this time by delegates from all over Hungary and - even more importantly - this time the election was followed by his coronation in Székesfehérvár with the sacred crown of St. Stephen (3 November 1527).

The massive defection of the Hungarian nobility to Ferdinand's side induced Zápolya to send a trusted envoy, Hieronym Łaski, to Constantinople to seek support from Süleyman. While Hieronym Łaski negotiated, Zápolya made a last attempt on the battlefield, but after attacking Kassa he was defeated by Ferdinand's troops near Szina (8 March 1528) and fled to Homonna and thence to Tarnów in Poland. Meanwhile, Süleyman granted Hieronym Łaski's request for assistance, probably with the aim of turning Hungary into an Ottoman vassal state, similar to Wallachia and Moldavia. Popular sympathy for Zápolya grew as a result of the support he obtained from the Pauline monk and bishop of Nagyvarád, "Frater" George (Hung. György) Martinuzzi (Utješnović), who soon took over the leadership of the anti-Habsburg faction from Zápolya. Encouraged by these developments, Zápolya returned to Hungary and defeated the Habsburg forces near Sárospatak. Transylvania and all counties east of the Tisa River then drew together around "Frater" George and Zápolya, who made Lippa his residence. Thus the bipartition of Hungary came about, with Habsburgs ruling "Royal Hungary" and Croatia-Slavonia, and Zápolya ruling Transylvania with the *Partes Annexae* as a vassal of the Ottoman Sultan.

#### 1529: The First Siege of Vienna

Hungary, in the years immediately following the battle of Mohács, rapidly became what it was long to remain, a divided land. Habsburg aims have been seen as the welding together of Austria, Bohemia and Hungary to form a formidable barrier against Ottoman aggression; those of the Ottoman sultan, at this point, were to establish Hungary and Transylvania as a vassal state, under a compliant native ruler, which would form, with Moldavia and Wallachia, a bulwark against further Habsburg encroachments. Thus, both Habsburg and Ottoman policies may be seen as essentially defensive, but both policies foundered on the intractable realities of the Hungarian 'problem'.

In 1528 Süleyman had recognised János Zápolya as 'king' of Hungary and promised him his protection. Ferdinand in response occupied Buda and sent envoys to Süleyman demanding the retrocession of all the border forts and strong places taken by the Ottomans since 1521: Süleyman, enraged, promised that he would 'come in person to Vienna and restore what the archduke demanded'.

Süleyman's campaign against Vienna in 1529, despite being led by the sultan in person and by his Grand Vizier, Ibrahim Pasha, was a failure, in that the first Ottoman siege of Vienna, like its success 154 years later, was unsuccessful. It may also be accounted a success, in that as a result, Zápolya was again installed in Buda as king of Hungary. The odds for a successful outcome were stacked against the Otto-

mans from the start: without forward bases, Vienna lay at or beyond the limits of what an Ottoman army could reach in a single campaign. The campaigning season ran for six months, approximately 185 days, from mid-April to mid-October, between spring and the earliest onset of winter, but it was impossible for an army to reach the line of the Sava River before early July. In 1529 the Ottoman army left Istanbul on 10 May. Belgrade was reached only in mid-July, and progress thereafter was impeded by incessant rain and flooded rivers, particularly at the crossings of the Dráva and Sava Rivers. Buda - in Habsburg hands -- was not reached until 3 September, after which almost two weeks were expended on besieging and taking control of the city and arranging for the enthronement of Zápolya. The onward march to Vienna took almost two further weeks, until 26/27 September: by this time the army had been on the road for 141 days - 83 of them on the march and 53 days of rest, with half of these rest days being enforced by the extreme weather, by flooded river crossings or by destroyed or impassable bridges.

Vienna was well fortified and bravely defended; its garrison had been strengthened by Spanish, Italian and Flemish troops, and desperate Ottoman attempts to undermine and breach the walls were all repulsed by the defenders. It has been said that Süleyman terminated the siege on 14 October, after only 18 days, not because he was defeated in battle by a superior relief force - there was none - but because the logistics of the situation - weather, sickness and a chronic lack of supplies -- had worked inexorably against him. Possibly, also, Vienna was not as strategically or politically as significant in 1529 as it had become by 1683 and, in any case, Süleyman had achieved for the time being what had been his main aim in the campaign, the establishment of a pliant puppet ruler in Buda.

There was no counter-offensive from the Habsburgs as the Ottoman army began its grim two-month retreat through the snow to Buda (26 October) and Belgrade (10 November), before finally reaching Istanbul on 16 December, no less than 220 days, more than seven months, since it had set out.

#### 1530-1540

After the failure of the Ottoman siege of Vienna, the Habsburg rulers undertook preliminary measures to organize the defence of their borders. In the Mediterranean, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V assigned the islands of Malta to the Knights Hospitaller, and it became their final outpost. In 1530 Habsburg forces attacked Süleyman's vassal Zápolya in Buda, thus providing the sultan with another *casus belli*. This induced him to personally lead another campaign - his fourth -- into Hungary, in 1532, in order, once again, to attempt to conquer Vienna. On their route of march the Ottomans halted to besiege the small fortress of Kőszeg, in order to entice a much stronger Habsburg army to leave its defensive position around Vienna and to give battle in open field. But the Habsburg forces did not move, and Kőszeg held out for three weeks, capitulating only on 28 August, too late in the campaigning season for Süleyman to advance on Vienna. In the end, the Ottomans retreated, laying waste the Austrian province of Styria and Slavonia as they went.

After his return to Constantinople Süleyman opened diplomatic negotiations. Ferdinand was willing accept the partition of Hungary and in 1531 concluded an Armistice, followed an agreement with Süleyman in Constantinople (22 June 1533). Ferdinand accepted the territorial status quo and herewith the partition of Hungary.

Süleyman was now engaged (1534-6) in a major campaign in the east, against the Safavid rulers of Iran. During this period of relative quiescence on the Danube frontier, the monk, "Frater" George Martinuzzi, Zápolya's main adviser, who had been recently appointed