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## Hunyadi's Long Campaign and the Battle of Varna 1443-1444

Historians of the Hunyadi-era usually treated the Long Campaign of 1443 and the Crusade of Varna of the following year as two separate events, connected by chronology and personality, yet separated by circumstance. While I worked on my research of János Hunyadi's life,<sup>1</sup> I found that the two campaigns were really part of the same effort and strategy, to take the initiative away from the Ottomans and transfer warfare to the occupied territories. When the Long Campaign happened to be successful, the Hungarians and their allies had decided to follow it up. The subsequent defeat of Varna was, therefore, part and parcel of the same process that began the previous year. Its ultimate purpose was the elimination of the Ottoman threat from Hungary's borders and the eventual expulsion of the Ottoman Turks from Europe.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for the traditional view are not difficult to discover. The Long Campaign was a glorious enterprise, taking Sultan Murad II by surprise, and it achieved a certain measure of success. It had given a whole new set of heroes to the aggregate of nationes (using this term in its medieval meaning) whose soldiers participated in the fighting. Varna, in turn, was a terrible disaster, one in which a valiant young king had been killed and which almost ended all efforts of the Hungarians against the Ottomans. It was a badly-conceived and inadequately prepared war. While the Long Campaign could have contributed to a lasting Polish-Hungarian alliance, Varna had ended in mutual recriminations and distrust. Treating the two events separately, therefore, gave historians of the nations that were involved a chance to balance success with failure and place the blame for Varna «on the other side».<sup>3</sup> A closer look at the two events, however,

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<sup>1</sup> HELD Joseph: *Hunyadi: Legend and Reality*. Boulder – New York 1985. (East European Monographs 178.)

<sup>2</sup> IORGA Nicolae: *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. 4<sup>e</sup> série (1453-1476). III. De 1453 à 1500*. Bucharest 1915, pp. 106-110.

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary and near-contemporary writers agreed upon the basic premises surrounding the campaign of Varna, but placed the blame for the defeat on different factors. THURÓCZY Joannes: *Chronicon Hungariae*. In: SCHWANDTNER Joannis G.(ed.): *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum veteres ac genuini partim*. Tom. 1-3. Wien 1766-1768, here Tom. 1, p. 41; CALLIMACHUS Philippus (Buonacorsi): *De rebus Uladislae Polonorum atque Hungarorum rege gestis. Varnensi 1739*, p. 307, and DŁUGOSZ Joannis (seu Longini): *Historiae Polonicae Libri XX*. Leipzig 1711-1712. Liber 12, p. 684 agreed that there actually was a «peace of Szeged», signed by King Ulászló I. Ottoman historians, although

will show that Varna was, indeed, rooted in the success of the Long Campaign, and one was the logical consequence of the other.

King Ulászló of Hungary (Wladislaw III of Poland) was not sure that he wanted war with the Ottomans. His rule in Hungary was not yet entirely secure and his long absence from Poland did not augur well for his authority in his home country. The easiest way out of his dilemma was to call the meeting of the Hungarian diet and sound out his supporters as to their intentions. Two men had the decisive voice at this diet, Julian Cardinal Caesarini, the legate of Pope Eugene IV to Hungary, Poland, the Germanies and Austria, and Djuradj Branković, the Serbian despot. Caesarini spared no effort and pursued his taks (the strengthening of the pope's authority and the organization of a campaign against the Muslims) with diligence. Branković, on his part, urged the king to turn his attention to the south. The Ottoman danger, he reasoned, was real and if the Hungarians refused to take it seriously, they would share the fate of Serbia, almost completely in Ottoman hands. Thus, Caesarini and Branković supported each other and argued that priority should be assigned to an Ottoman war.<sup>4</sup>

Events were taking place outside of Hungary that tended to support Caesarini and Branković. In April 1443, Pope Eugene IV had discussed the possibility of providing galleys for the anti-Ottoman campaign with Ser Leonardo Venerio, the Venetian ambassador to Rome. The plan which they agreed on was that the papacy would levy a tithe on the revenues of the Florentine and the Venetian clergy, and use the funds for equipping the galleys and paying the sailors who were to be hired. The Signoria was willing to cooperate but believed that the revenues in question would not be sufficiently large to yield the required 20,000 gold florins.

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not directly citing the treaty, refer to it in their works. However, according to Islamic law, no permanent peace treaty was possible with nonbelievers, only armistices could be arranged. This may have confused PROCHASKA Anthony: *Uwagi Krytyczne o klesce Wamenskije* [Critical Remarks about the Disaster of Varna]. Cracow 1900, pp. 1-60, who asserted that King Ulászló I had never signed a peace agreement with the Sultan. His arguments were uncritically accepted by BRÜCKNER Albrecht: *Geschichte der polnischen Literatur*. Leipzig 1901. Vol. 1, p. 628. Even Oscar HALECKI could not resist the lure of Prochaska's argument in his *The Crusade of Varna. A Discussion of Controversial Problems*. New York 1943. For a discussion of Prochaska's sources and arguments see RÁ CZ Lajos – FRAKNÓI Vilmos – BLEYER Jakab – THŰRY József: *Igazság vagy tévedés?* [Truth or mistake?]. In: *Századok* 36 (1902), pp. 631-653.

It should be mentioned that a modern critical edition of Thuróczy had been published by the Akadémiai Kiadó. – THUROCZ Ioannes de: *Chronica Hungarorum*. I. Textus edited by Erzsébet GALÁNTAI and Gyula KRISTÓ. Budapest 1985, as part of the *Bibliotheca scriptorum medii recentisque aevorum*. Series nova. Tom. VII. At the writing of this article the publication was not yet available for the author, but its later perusal would not require any changes in the text. One other important evaluation of Thuróczy's work was provided by MÁLYUSZ Elemér: *A Thuróczy krónika és forrásai* [The Chronicle of Thuróczy and its Sources]. Budapest 1967. There are various editions of Długosz' and Callimachus' works, the latest of these coming in the 1870's and 1893, respectively. However, there are only slight differences in the texts of these editions, and they do not effect this article.

<sup>4</sup> For Branković's role see THURÓCZY: Tom. 1, p. 488.

Furthermore, one of the Signoria's conditions included the establishment of peace between Milan and Florence without which it could not provide the galleys, and this obviously was outside the power of Pope Eugene IV.

Nevertheless, the pope appointed Francesco Cardinal Condolmieri, his cousin and chancellor at the curia, as his legate to Venice, and entrusted him with the task of organizing the naval force. He also named Condolmieri the admiral of the galleys when and if these were ready to sail. However, there were long delays in the project. The Signoria's worries proved to be correct. The funds that were collected sufficed only to equip six of the galleys. When no further funds were forthcoming, the plan of using the galleys in the Ottoman war was abandoned.

This episode was not really important at the time of the Long Campaign. However, the following year a similar plan was worked out, proposing the use of a naval force to blockade the Bosphorus and the Hellespont. This plan ended by sending 17 galleys to the straits, but the results were anything but gratifying. In fact, the Hungarians' complete trust in the ability of the galleys to block traffic in the straits was an important reason for their overconfidence and eventual defeat at Varna in 1444.

King Ulászló I now sent emissaries to Poland for troops, and Cardinal Caesarini began recruiting for mercenaries and crusaders in Germany and Bohemia. Messengers were also sent to Moldavia and Vallachia, and even to the Teutonic Knights, asking for their support in the coming war.<sup>5</sup> However, most envoys returned without success.<sup>6</sup> The emperor, Friedrich III of Habsburg, also refused to help: he suspected that, would Ulászló I gain a decisive victory over the Ottoman Turks, the young king would turn against him next.

Branković had, of course, very good reasons to urge the Hungarians on to war. Most of his kingdom was in Ottoman hands, including the major fortresses of Golubac and Smederevo. Only Belgrade still withstood the Ottoman pressure, and this was in Hungarian hands. Branković's two sons were Ottoman captives: he himself was a refugee in Hungary. However, it was becoming ever clearer that the resources of the Kingdom of Hungary, even strengthened by some of that of Poland, were inadequate for a really large-scale Ottoman war.

Hunyadi was aware of this: he was to devise an ingenious strategy that evened out the odds.

Meanwhile, Branković continued to press for the war at the royal court. The Hungarian king and some of the great lords eventually went along with him and the cardinal. Their decision was helped by the news which they received from Ragusa that the sultan had left for Asia Minor in order to settle scores with the Emir

<sup>5</sup> For the origins of the Long Campaign and Hunyadi's role in its preparation see THURÓCZY: Tom. 1, p. 252-253. Also, the letter of King Ulászló I to the county authorities of Közép-Szolnok in: ORSZÁGOS LEVÉLTÁR [National Archives] Budapest. DIPLOMATARIA. 65,057. (From now on OL.DL.)

<sup>6</sup> There was no lack of claimants later for the success of the Long Campaign. See, for instance, the letter of Pope Eugene IV in PETTKÓ Béla: Kapisztrán János levelezése a magyarokkal [The Correspondence of János Kapisztrán with the Hungarians]. in: Történelmi Tár. Új folyam II (1901), pp. 161-222, here pp. 162-163.

of Karaman, and that he may have already suffered a serious defeat at the hands of his Muslim enemy.<sup>7</sup> The lords felt that, if necessary, they could restrain the enemies of King Ulászló I, while he was in Ottoman-held lands.<sup>8</sup> Hunyadi was entrusted with the organization of the army. Branković offered to finance part of the expenses and bring his own troops along. Hunyadi and Ujlaki were to contribute their own banderia.<sup>9</sup>

Matters progressed slowly. The king became more and more impatient. On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1443, he left Buda in the company of Caesarini, Branković and several Polish and Hungarian lords, taking whatever troops were available. However, when the rest of the army was finally assembled, the number of soldiers appeared respectable. No wonder; Hunyadi alone spent over 32,000 gold florins from his own funds to hire battle-hardened mercenaries, including former Czech Hussites and Serbian refugees. He had a sizeable cavalry and hundreds of battle-wagons.<sup>10</sup> Caesarini, too, brought along Czech and German mercenaries. The banderia of Hunyadi and Ujlaki rounded out the army, although Ujlaki himself would go only later. As they marched along the lower Danube, Vlach soldiers joined the ranks. After crossing the great river at Belgrade (and bypassing the fortresses that were in Ottoman hands), Branković's 8,000 soldiers also joined the army. They were accompanied by Vlad Dracul of Vallachia.<sup>11</sup> Altogether about 38,000 soldiers marched under the flag of the King of Hungary of which about 12,000 were part of Hunyadi's banderium.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> CALLIMACHUS, p. 487.

<sup>8</sup> IVÁNYI Béla: Bártfa szabad királyi város oklevéltára [The Archives of the Free Royal Town of Bártfa]. Budapest 1914, pp. 71-72. See also TELEKI József: Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon [The Age of the Hunyadis in Hungary]. Vol. 10. Pest 1853, pp. 133f., 140-142, 330f.

<sup>9</sup> SZÉKELY Ottokár: Hunyadi János első török hadjáratai [The First Turkish Campaigns of János Hunyadi]. In: *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 20/21 (1919-1921), p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Beheim, a German folk-balladier who received first-hand information from a «Hans Mägest», a participant in the Long Campaign, stated that Ulászló I's army consisted of 14,000 well-armed soldiers, in KARAJAN Theodor G. von: *Zehn Gedichte M. Behaims zur Geschichte Österreichs und Ungarns*. In: *Quellen und Forschungen zur vaterländischen Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst*. Wien 1849, pp. 1-65, here pp. 35-46, as quoted by BLEYER Jakab: *Beheim Mihály élete és művei a magyar történelem szempontjából* [The Life and Work of Mihály Beheim from the Point of View of Hungarian History]. In: *Századok* 36 (1902), pp. 222-246. See also DEUGOSZ: *Liber 12*, p. 779; FEJÉR Georgius: *Genus, incunabula et virtus Joannis Corvini de Hunyad, regni Hungariae gubernatoris, argumentis criticis illustrata*, pp. 71-75. (= FEJÉR Georgius: *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*. Tom. 11. Budae 1844.) According to a Czech mercenary who participated in the campaign, Hunyadi had 600 battle wagons – see HUBER Alfons: *Die Kriege zwischen Ungarn und den Türken (1440-1443)*. in: *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte*. Vol. 68 (1886), pp. 159-207, here p. 198.

<sup>11</sup> See Branković's letter to Hunyadi in FEJÉR, pp. 71-75.

<sup>12</sup> TELEKI, p. 334, says that there were 25,000 soldiers; BONFINI Antonius: *Rerum Ungaricarum decades*. Pozsony 1776, p. 457, mentioned 15,000; FRAKNÓI Vilmos: *Egyháznagyok a magyar középkorból* [Prelates of the Middle Ages in Hungary]. Budapest 1896, p. 37, said that 40,000 men

The campaign lasted from early September 1443, to early February 1444. Thus, it began when the season for warfare was almost over, and it was on unusually long duration. Hunyadi's calculations (he was undoubtedly behind the strategy) proved correct; he expected that the European contingents of the Ottoman army would already be dispersed for the winter. His troops carried along sufficient provisions. Hunyadi was also aware that the sultan had not yet returned from Asia Minor and would need time to reassemble his troops. He counted on help in food and fodder from the Serbian population that Branković's presence guaranteed.<sup>13</sup>

Historians generally disagree on the number of engagements fought during the Long Campaign. The discrepancies probably originated from Hunyadi's several smaller battles fought immediately before the Long Campaign.<sup>14</sup> However, all accounts agree that the Hungarian army won all the engagements that it fought.

The skirmishes began almost immediately after the crossing of the Danube. Hunyadi moved fast; he sent small scouting detachments ahead of the main army. These were large enough to defend themselves yet very mobile. Meanwhile, the main army moved south in the Morava valley.

Hunyadi's tactic immediately paid off. One of his scouting companies was on its way toward the town of Alexinac on the opposite side of the river, consisting of about 500 cavalrymen. It surprised a small Ottoman detachment camping nearby and completely annihilated it. But the appearance of a larger contingent forced the scouts to turn back. Hunyadi now crossed the river with his own banderium, leaving all his baggage behind with such stealth that he had them surrounded under the cover of darkness without being noticed. At daybreak, Hunyadi attacked

took part. However, there is no way to ascertain the exact numbers. I discussed the issue of the size of armies in the Balkans in: *The Defense of Belgrade 1456. A Discussion of Controversial Issues*. In: VARDY Stephen B. et al. (eds.): *Society in Change. Essays in Honor of Béla K. Király*. Boulder – New York 1983, pp. 25-48. (East European Monographs 132.) There is also a recent critical edition – BONFINI Antonius: *Rerum Ungaricarum decades*. Edited by Margit KULCSAR and Péter KULCSAR. Budapest 1976, as part of *Bibliotheca scriptorum medii recentisque aevorum. Series nova. Tom. 1*. Another important discussion of Bonfini's work is that by KULCSAR Péter: *Bonfini magyar történetének forrásai és keletkezése* [The Origin and Sources of Bonfini's Hungarian History]. Budapest 1973.

<sup>13</sup> That this was truly the case was shown by the letter of Hunyadi to Ujlaki quoted by ELEKES Lajos: *Hunyadi*. Budapest 1955, p. 200: «A great many Bosnians, Bulgars, Serbs and Albanians are constantly arriving in our camp, bringing with them all sorts of presents. They brought us so much fresh food that our provisions are practically untouched.» However, I disagree with the conclusion which Elekes draws from this letter, namely, that this would have reflected a principle underlying all of Hunyadi's campaigns, according to which he purportedly tried to forge an alliance with «the peoples of the Balkans» against the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>14</sup> According to TELEKI, p. 337, the reason for this was the fact that contemporaries mentioned one or two battles each, and none mentioned all. About the early skirmishes see the letter of Caspar Schlick in WOLKAN Rudolf (ed.): *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini. I. Abteilung. Briefe aus der Laienzeit 1431-1445. II. Bd. Amtliche Briefe*. Wien 1909, pp. 42-44. (*Fontes Rerum Austriacarum* 62.)

and destroyed the group which consisted of about 2,000 Ottoman soldiers, killing and capturing many, including some high ranking officers.<sup>15</sup> In this wake, the main army also crossed the Morava and established its camp near Alexinac.

Hunyadi did not wait for the arrival of the main army, led by the king himself. Without the encumbrance of baggage, he moved on swiftly, taking the city of Niš by surprise, burning it to the ground and pillaging its environment. Just before he reached Sofia, his scouts reported three different Ottoman army groups nearby, slowly converging on each other. One of them was led by Ishak pasha of Szendrő; the other two moved from the direction of the town of Kniazevac and Pirot, Sofia respectively. Hunyadi engaged the three forces in separate battles and destroyed them one by one. He attacked the pasha of Szendrő first around the village of Malča and defeated him. Then he crossed over to the left bank of the Nišava river, attacked the column advancing from Sofia and dispersed it. The following day Hunyadi defeated the third Ottoman detachment led by Turkhan pasha on the road to Leškovac.<sup>16</sup> He then established a camp near the Morava, where the news reached him about a concentration of Ottoman troops moving toward the main army. Hunyadi swiftly doubled back, surprised the enemy and annihilated it.<sup>17</sup>

It seemed that Ragusa's report about the unpreparedness of the Ottoman empire to oppose the invasion was not entirely correct. At least, there were plenty of Ottoman soldiers ready and willing to resist the invasion, even if in an uncoordinated fashion. But there was no stopping Hunyadi. He moved on to Sofia, always a day's march ahead of the main army. He crossed the Kunovica pass, destroyed Pirot, and reached and burned Sofia. Here he took a short rest.<sup>18</sup>

It was now time to reunite the two armies. Ujlaki himself arrived from Hungary with reinforcements.<sup>19</sup> The united army proceeded to the foothills of the Balkan Mountains in order to force its way through to Edirne. Here it encountered its first setback.

Three passes led from Sofia toward Philippopolis and Edirne. The one through Ichtiman and the Gate of Traian had, at that time, the best road. The southern pass leading through the upper valley of the Marica River, and the third pass that crossed the valleys of the Zlatica and Topolnica streams, were more difficult to traverse.

<sup>15</sup> The letter of Hunyadi to Ujlaki, dated November 18<sup>th</sup> 1443, in KATONA Stephanus: *Historia critica regum Hungariae*. Tom. 13. Pestini 1790, p. 251; FEJÉR, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> There are conflicting opinions about this engagement. Hunyadi's letter in KATONA, p. 674, mentioned the capture of the pashas in this battle.

<sup>17</sup> KATONA, p. 674. According to Hunyadi, the news about this Ottoman detachment reached him on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was moving towards the main army, gathering to itself the previously dispersed troops. When Hunyadi exited from the Nišava Valley, his way was barred by this detachment led by Ali bey, son of Tincurtas; Balaban pasha of Tokat; the beys of Vidin and Sofia and Daud Celebi, brother of Halil Pasha, the Grand Vizier. Hunyadi estimated that altogether they had 30,000 soldiers. According to him, 2,000 Osmanli died in the ensuing battle and 4,000 were captured.

<sup>18</sup> SZÉKELY, p.29.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

Sultan Murad II was certainly surprised by the speed, size, and persistence of the attack. By the time the invading army reached the mountains, however, he was ready, although his forces were strong enough only to defend the passes.<sup>20</sup> The weather had also changed and now it favored the defenders. Food and fodder supplies began to dwindle as well. In mid-December, the Hungarian army tried to force its way through the Ichtiman pass but it was repulsed. Hunyadi now turned toward the Zlatica pass, but he failed to cross it. The Ottomans barricaded the road, felled trees, and rolled boulders on top of the attackers.<sup>21</sup>

By then, the Hungarians were exhausted. As their army began to wind its way back to the north, Murad sent the beylerbey of Rumeli, Kasim pasha, in pursuit. But Hunyadi was not to be surprised. Near Slivnica he set a trap for the pursuing enemy. The rear guard of the main army, led by Branković who belied his age in this campaign, retreated seemingly in great haste, drawing the Ottomans across a small stream, the Červenka. Here Hunyadi's troops were waiting for them and soon forced them to flee toward the mountains in disarray. Hunyadi pursued them, killing and capturing a great many soldiers. However, by now the Hungarian army was no longer capable of a sustained effort. (It is likely that the king himself was slightly wounded in the last engagement.) The Hungarian army resumed its march, arrying many prisoners; among other dignitaries, they captured Kasim pasha and Mahmud Celebi, the latter one of the brotehrs-in-law of the sultan, brother of Halil pasha, the grand vizier.<sup>22</sup>

Having learned their lesson, the Ottomans pursued the Hungarian army at a respectful distance. Nevertheless, they continued to harass the stragglers. It was decided, therefore, to speed up the retreat; unnecessary equipment was destroyed and part of the booty burnt. The bodies of fallen soldiers which the army carried on its homeward march, were now buried. Its load considerably lightened, the

<sup>20</sup> Exaggerations about the size of Ottoman armies were expectable. Beheim mentioned 200,000, in: BLEYER, p. 222. LAONICOS Chalcocondilas Atheniensis: *Historiarum Libri Decem*. Translated from the Greek by C. C. Turgurino. Venice 1739, p. 308, asserted that both Asian and European troops participated on the Ottoman side. The Ottoman Anonymous Chronicler, in: THÜRY József: *Török Történetírók [Turkish Historians]*. Vol. 1. Budapest 1893, pp. 18-20 (= *Török-Magyarkori történelmi emlékek. II. Osztály [Historic Monuments from Turkish-Hungarian Times]*), supported this assertion.

<sup>21</sup> LAONICOS' colorful description of Murad II's council, pp. 309-311, about the need to continue the war is interesting. According to him, the sultan wanted to force an open battle. But Turhan pasha, the bey of Thessaly, objected; he recommended withdrawal and what amounted to a scorched-earth tactic. Jese, son of Evrenos, suggested that the passes should be denied to the Hungarians instead. This was the recommendation eventually accepted. Hunyadi's letter addressed to Temes county stated: «[...] our army proceeded to Philippopolis, then on to the Zlatica Mountain, whose peaks and passes were occupied by the army of the Turkish Emperor, fearful that otherwise the army of our king and of the regnum would be victorious [...]», in: OL.DL. 30,810. This battle occurred on Christmas day 1443.

<sup>22</sup> For the last battle see SZÉKELY, p. 54-56. This took place on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1444. THURÓCZY: Tom. 1, p. 254, emphasizes the capture of Celebi. See also LAONICOS, p. 315.

army of the King of Hungary and Hunyadi soon reached Belgrade. It was late January 1444; after a few days' rest, the troops moved on, reaching Buda on February 2<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>23</sup>

The results of the Long Campaign seemed at first electrifying. Thousand of Ottoman prisoners were taken, among them thirteen high ranking officers.<sup>24</sup> The notion of Ottoman invincibility seemed to have been ended and the threat to Hungary removed. And this was achieved by an army relatively modest in size.

However, a closer look at the situation will reveal that the Long Campaign was something less than the overwhelming success believed by contemporaries. Serbia was not freed; her major fortresses remained in ottoman hands, except, of course, Belgrade. No matter how much Western Europeans rejoiced over the victorious campaign, in fact, it represented little more than a tactical, not strategic success.<sup>25</sup> Branković was correct when he urged the king and Hunyadi for the renewal of the campaign next summer or fall. It is of course an entirely different matter to consider the strategic forces; the Hungarians were basically exhausted by December 1443, and could not renew the campaign without substantial help from Western Europe. Ottoman power in the Balkans was only dented in 1443, but not broken.

When the troops arrived at Buda, the celebration of the victors began in earnest. A whole flock of western envoys were already there. They came from Spain, France, Aragon, even from England; there were representatives from Milan, Florence, Venice and Genoa. The pope's envoys had just arrived as well as those of Burgundy. Even the Byzantine emperor, John Paleologue, sent his ambassadors to Buda, offering his cooperation against the Ottomans.<sup>26</sup> Most importantly, the pope's message stated that the joint navy of Italian states and Burgundy would be ready to sail for the straights by mid-year.

This was, of course, so much hot wind. The West Europeans who were not directly threatened by the Ottomans were not really interested in a joint enterprise. They were quite willing to have the Hungarians and other assorted East European

<sup>23</sup> Branković apparently wanted to have the army stay in Belgrade for the winter, but this the king did not consent to.

<sup>24</sup> THURÓCZY: Tom. 1, p. 254. According to Beheim in BLEYER, p. 227, the high-ranking captives were turned over to Branković presumably to be exchanged for his sons, but the serbian did not accept the presents. However, when Ottoman envoys were sent to negotiate for the release of the captives, they did go to Branković.

<sup>25</sup> KROPP Lajos: Jehan de Wavrin krónikájából [From the Chronicles of Jehan de Wavrin]. In: Századok 28 (1894), pp. 679-685.

<sup>26</sup> As Hunyadi noted in his letter to Pope Eugene IV, dated May 11<sup>th</sup> 1445: «[...] all the nearby rulers, including those of Moldavia, Bulgaria, Albania, and even that of Constantinople offered us armed assistance and said: 'fly', they said, 'faster than the wind, we had already taken care of everything [...] but we were not given any help, and our supply lines were interrupted [...]» Hunyadi's Letter in Epistolae Joannis de Zredna. In: SCHWANDTNER: Tom. 2, p. 17; also published in Hungarian translation in: KOVÁCS V. S. (ed.): Magyar Humanisták Levelezése [The Correspondence of Hungarian Humanists]. Budapest 1968, p. 69.

peoples go on with «their war» promising them support which they never meant to fulfill. Of the Italian States, Venice and Genoa had lucrative trade with the Ottoman Empire and had no intention of helping to destroy the source of their rich income. Typical was the behavior of the prince of Milan; he sent a letter comparing Caesarini to Moses and ordered a three-day thanksgiving holiday in his city for the successes of 1443. But he sent no troops or money to help in the renewal of the struggle.

The members of the Hungarian royal council were divided over the issue of the renewal of the campaign. Their hesitation resulted from a new development. The king was approached by the sultan's envoys while on the return march from the campaign, offering a long-term truce on very favorable terms.<sup>27</sup> The king and some of his lords were interested in exploring the offer. The Polish nobles in the King's entourage were among these. They were worried about the long absence of their king from Poland. There was unconfirmed news about a raid led against Halich by the Mongols, and rumors of unrest in Oppeln. Now Hunyadi himself had second thoughts about the renewal of the war. He became interested in the truce with the Ottomans probably at the urging of Branković who had himself changed his tune and was now in favor of accepting Murad II's offer.

Cardinal Caesarini was the most outspoken supporter of a new campaign in the Balkans. He wanted war on a much larger scale than the last one, hopefully culminating in the expulsion of the Ottomans from Europe. His motives now included the possibility of the unification of the Orthodox and Roman Christian churches (by force, if necessary). In anticipation of this, the pope had already extended Caesarini's legacy to Greece and Asia Minor.

The cardinal spoke eloquently of the need for a new war. He was supported by the Byzantine envoys who asserted that the sultan once again crossed over to Anatolia.<sup>28</sup> The Venetians declared that the fleet would soon be ready to sail and block the Hellespontos and the Bosphorus.

King Ulászló I was still hesitant to commit himself. He kept his options open despite his loud proclamations that he would go to war no matter what happened. Unknown to Caesarini and even most of the great lords at his court, he secretly sent an emmissary to Edirne, accompanied by the envoys of Hunyadi and Branković, in order to explore the sultan's offer of a truce.<sup>29</sup>

It seems that the royal council was not too keen on the war. Therefore, the king decided to consult the diet before making his decision. When the diet met, the nobles were more interested in the internal conditions of the realm than in the Ottoman war. First of all, they enacted measures to strengthen royal authority.<sup>30</sup> When they turned to foreign policy, they inclined towards war with the Ottomans. This was not a difficult matter; after all, by Hungarian custom, the lesser nobles could not be compelled to participate in war outside the borders of Hungary unless

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<sup>27</sup> For the memoirs of a Czech soldier describing this mission see HUBER, p. 199.

<sup>28</sup> TELEKI, p. 417.

<sup>29</sup> HALECKI, pp. 13-31.

<sup>30</sup> TELEKI, p. 420.

they contracted themselves out as familiares. In any case, the diet proclaimed that the king should use his own personal resources if he wanted to go to war and refused to order the general mobilization of the lesser nobility, the *generalis exercitus*.<sup>31</sup>

The preparations for war had nevertheless started. Envoys were sent to ask for aid. The Byzantine emperor promised to mobilize his forces and coordinate his attack on the Ottomans with the Hungarian King. The Albanian Skanderbeg (George Kastrioti) promised to join the expedition with 30,000 men. But help from the West was not forthcoming with the exception of a small fleet of galleys.<sup>32</sup>

As time passed, Branković became more and more dubious about the chances of success. He observed that, this time around, the army would be even smaller than the previous year. He also noted that the plan of the campaign, as proposed by Caesarini, would once again bypass the Serbian fortresses. Finally, he received the sultan's message and it is possible that he concluded a separate long-term truce with Murad II.<sup>33</sup>

Hunyadi was undoubtedly disturbed by the lack of Western support. Nevertheless, he did not go to Transylvania in order to put his banderium on a war footing.<sup>34</sup>

Sultan Murad II did not expect the renewal of the war with the Hungarians. He was convinced that his offer of a truce was so good that it could not be rejected. Trusting in the conclusion of the truce, a copy of whose terms he had signed, he left his son, the future Mehemed II, as his European regent and left for Anatolia.<sup>35</sup> Before leaving, he sent his envoys to Branković, offering him ransom for Mahmud Celebi, requesting once again that the king sign the truce, and that Branković intervene on its behalf.

The royal council must have learned about the negotiations with the sultan right about this time. The terms were so favorable indeed that the council was seriously tempted by them. The terms included the return of all Serbian fortresses to Branković and the freeing of all Serbian lands. Since Branković was a vassal of

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> In a letter dated Nagyvárad, May 2nd 1444, King Ulászló I requested help from the Teutonic Order, remarking that the pope promised to send 38 galleys of which the Venetians were to supply 12, the King of Aragon 10, the Prince of Burgundy 6, that of Milan 8, and the Grand Master of Rhodes 2. This would certainly have been a formidable armada, fully capable of closing the narrows. See THALLÓCZY Lajos – ALDÁSY Antal (eds.): *Codex diplomaticus partium regno Hungariae adnexarum. A Magyarország és Szerbia közti összeköttetések oklevéltára 1198-1526* [The Archives of the Connections between Hungary and Serbia]. Budapest 1907, p. 144. (*Monumenta Hungariae historica. Diplomataria* 33.)

<sup>33</sup> HALECKI, pp. 13-31.

<sup>34</sup> ANGYAL Dávid: *A szegedi béke* [The Peace of Szeged]. In: *Budapesti Szemle* 144 (1919), pp. 207-231.

<sup>35</sup> See the letters of Sultan Murad II, in: THURY József: *A vámai csatáról* [About the Battle of Varna]. In: *Hadtörténeti Közlemények* 5 (1892), pp. 638-641.

the King of Hungary, this would have strengthened Hungary's position in the Balkans as well. Hunyadi himself came out openly for the truce.<sup>36</sup>

The events of the following months are not entirely explicable. It seems that, contrary to previously held opinions originating with the contemporary Joannis Długosz (Longini), King Ulászló I did not fully commit himself to the truce signed by the sultan. He went to the city of Szeged with a large retinue and here he met the sultan's envoys.<sup>37</sup>

In the royal council Caesarini continued to argue for the continuation of the war.<sup>38</sup> But the sultan was right; his offer could not be rejected out of hand. Both Hunyadi and Branković favored the truce as did many of the Polish and Hungarian lords. The royal council's advice favored the acceptance of the truce. But we do not know if the king had actually signed the agreement. No copy of it had ever been found among the Hungarian documents. However, one of the conditions, the return of Serbian fortresses to Branković, was already being fulfilled.<sup>39</sup>

Pál Engel advanced an ingenious and imaginative explanation for the dilemma of historians represented by the so-called «peace of Szeged».<sup>40</sup> He suggested that the negotiations with the sultan and the seeming vacillations of the Hungarian king were simply a ruse designed to gain time, and to keep the Ottomans guessing. Engel maintains that the two declarations of the king, issued in April and August respectively, show that he was determined to go back to the Balkans and that all subsequent discussions were overshadowed by these statements. In the August declaration the king stated that «all other oaths about peace were invalid», suggesting that he knew beforehand that a truce would not be concluded, no matter what happened between the spring and the fall. Thus, Engel argues: «The Peace of Szeged (Really of Nagyvárad) was a well acted-out charade

<sup>36</sup> ANGYAL, p. 145; TELEKI, p. 432.

<sup>37</sup> The misunderstanding over this issue may have originated in the misreading of a document by PROCHASKA. He stated that BATHYÁNY Ignác: *Leges ecclesiasticae regni Hungariae et provinciarum adiacentium*. Tom. 1-3. Albae Carolina – Claudiopoli 1785-1827, here Tom. 1, p. 487, mentioned that the king did not sign the peace treaty. But what Bathyány had actually said was that the King of Hungary and Poland did sign a treaty, but this was not the outcome of the arguments presented by Cardinal Caesarini. HALECKI, pp. 32-35, himself was misled by Prochaska's argument. Besides, there was a host of documents referring to the agreement, even if it was only a truce. See the letter of Eneas Silvius Piccolomini to Piero da Noceto in: WOLKAN: Bd. 1. *Privatbriefe*. Wien 1909, pp. 61-62. (*Fontes Rerum Austriacarum* 61.)

<sup>38</sup> TELEKI, p. 437.

<sup>39</sup> For the negotiations see DŁUGOSZ: Tom. 12, p. 699-711.

<sup>40</sup> ENGEL Pál: A szegedi ekü és a váradi béke. Adalék az 1444. év eseménytörténetéhez [The Oath of Szeged and the Peace of Várad. Some Data for the History of the Events of the Year 1444]. In: BALAZS Éva H. – FÜGEDI Erik – MAKSAY Ferenc (eds.): *Mályusz Elemér emlékkönyv* [Essays Presented to Elemér Mályusz]. Budapest 1984, pp. 77-96, and the English-language version: János Hunyadi, the Decisive Years of His Career 1440-1444. In: BAK János M. – KIRÁLY Béla (eds.): *From Hunyadi to Rákóczi. War and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Hungary*. Boulder – New York 1982, pp. 103-124. (*East European Monographs* 104.)

[... for which] Hunyadi accepted responsibility, as he had been willing to swear to it personally, while the more timorous king simply acquiesced in his oath.» Engel further argues that Hunyadi's motive was his previous agreement with Branković. Since Caesarini probably considered Hunyadi's position as a defection from the «Christian cause», he may have designed a formula for the truce in such a way that it could be easily annulled. The plan was, thus, a complex one, and the full details were probably only known to the cardinal.

Engel's arguments are indeed plausible. They explain the king's vacillations, Hunyadi's changing of sides, Branković's subsequent hostility to the war, the sultan's outrage at the broken «peace agreement», and his leaving for Anatolia while the Hungarians were preparing for the renewal of the war.

However, there is also a less complex explanation advanced by Halecki that explains the events equally well. Indeed, if Branković concluded a separate truce with the sultan and then promised to bring Hunyadi and the king along as well, and finally, he proceeded to mollify Hunyadi by giving him some of his properties, all the major actors would have behaved the same way. What eventually mattered was the opportunity to expell the Ottomans from Europe, and this was certainly encouraged by the success of the Long Campaign of 1443, and the news of the sultan's troubles in Anatolia. Neither the king, nor Hunyadi would easily miss the opportunity that these events seemed to present. Such a weighty undertaking obviously involved some hesitation; but going to war in 1444 was the logical outcome of events which no one in Hungary could ignore.

Nevertheless, on August 4<sup>th</sup>, the king issued a ringing declaration of war; despite this, the campaign did not start immediately suggesting that the king was still hesitant in making an irrevocable committment.<sup>41</sup>

At about this time, news of the departure of the galleys from Venice reached the king's court. This may have given the final push for the war. Still, preparations for the campaign continued at a snail's pace. Soon Cardinal Condolmieri sent a message that his galleys had reached their destination and were in the process of patrolling the waterways between Europe and Asia Minor. He reported that the sultan was still on the wrong side. He was confident of being able to stop the Ottomans if they wanted to cross over to Europe.<sup>42</sup> Another message came from the Emir of Karaman stating (falsely as it turned out) that Murad II had abdicated in favor of Mehemed and that there was unrest in the empire. He urged the Hungari-

<sup>41</sup> For Ulászló I's declaration see FRAKNÓI Vilmos: A várnai csata előzményei [The Premises of the Battle of Varna]. In: *Hadtörténeti Közlemények* 2 (1889), pp. 337-388. DŁUGOSZ: Tom. 12, p. 792-793, stated that Hunyadi's ambition to become the King of Bulgaria influenced the king to renounce the truce. However, Długosz was such a biassed historian, that he presented no proof of his argument; his hatred for Hunyadi was so obvious that his statements must be taken with caution.

<sup>42</sup> The news about the sailing of the galleys reached Buda by the end of July. The plans and events leading up to the galley's departure discussed Waleran Seigneur de Wavrin in DUPONT M. (ed.): *Anciennes Chroniques d'Engleterre*. Paris 1858-1863. Vol. 2, pp. 36-40. According to this account, the number of vessels was reduced to 29, but not even this number was available when the time for departure arrived. For a discussion of this issue see KROFF, p. 682, Note 25.

ans to attack.<sup>43</sup> As events were to show, Murad II was fully capable of responding to an emergency. Further reports came that Murad II had freed the sons of Branković and that the transfer of the Serbian fortresses was proceeding slowly.

Branković was now vigorously opposed to the war. But the king received new encouragements from the Byzantine emperor. He renewed his pledge of help. Skanderbeg also sent a message about his readiness to join the king's army.<sup>44</sup>

When the army finally began its move to the south, it was much smaller than the one of 1443. It crossed the Danube at Orsova on September 21<sup>st</sup>, numbering about 10,000 soldiers. Hunyadi expected more men to join, including his own banderium, and he waited at the crossing until October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Thereafter he moves slowly, gathering additional men and reached the vicinity of Vidin on October 9<sup>th</sup>.<sup>45</sup>

The army avoided the straight road to Edirne across the mountain passes on account of its experiences the year before. Instead, it followed the one to Nicopolis winding between the sea and the Balkan Mountains. Shortly before reaching Nicopolis, Hunyadi joined the main army.

However, this campaign greatly differed from that of a year before. First of all, Hunyadi's troops seemed to have crossed Wallachia «looting all the way».<sup>46</sup> They did the same in the vicinity of Nicopolis. In spite of the Wallachian «episode», Vlad Dracul came to join the king's army at Vidin with his men. But he was justifiably angry with Hunyadi and this did not augur well for the future.<sup>47</sup>

The leaders held a council of war at Nicopolis. Vlad Dracul was reported to have noted that the king's army was smaller in size than the sultan's everyday

<sup>43</sup> TELEKI, p. 440.

<sup>44</sup> TELEKI, p. 412. Ulászló's actions seemed to express reservations about the new campaign until the moment of his departure. For instance, after the declaration of August 4<sup>th</sup> he left Szeged for Nagyvárad where he spent several weeks. See KWIATOWSKI Stanislaw: *Itinerarium Wladislawa (III) Wamenczyka. Lemberg 1879*, pp. 26-27. From Nagyvárad Ulászló I travelled to Temesvár where he stayed for several more days. Two weeks were spent at Orsova before the king crossed the Danube at the end of September. See BLEYER, p. 348.

<sup>45</sup> KWIATOWSKI, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> TELEKI, p. 430. According to PALATIO Andreas de: *Litterae de clade Vamensi ad Ludovicum Cardinalem datae*. Edited by A. Prochaska. Lemberg 1882, p.22, the army moved slowly. Beheim, in BLEYER, pp. 349 and 354, mentions the sacking of a city, probably Kladowa. All the sources flatly contradict ELEKES Lajos: *A délkelet-európai népek összefogása a török hódítók ellen Hunyadi háborúiban* [The Union of the Peoples of South-Eastern Europe against the Turkish Conquerors in Hunyadi's Wars]. In: *Századok* 86 (1952), pp. 96-97, according to which Hunyadi would have promoted some sort of «people's war» against the Ottomans. The fact was that Hunyadi and his allies were motivated by various interests, indeed; some of them changed sides several times as the balance of power shifted. This was certainly the case with Vlad Dracul in 1444 and 1446, and with Branković in 1444 and 1448.

<sup>47</sup> The sacking and burning of Vidin is described by Beheim, see BLEYER, p. 349. Although PALATIO contradicted this account, Beheim proved to be a more reliable witness.

hunting party and counselled retreat.<sup>48</sup> He also observed that the large number of battle wagons that the army brought along were not loaded with provisions and spare arms, but with treasure as if the participating lords were going on a holiday.<sup>49</sup> He urged the king to abandon «this foolishness», and turn back. Many of their lords in the king's entourage thought that he was right. But Hunyadi and Caesarini opposed the abandonment of the campaign without striking a blow. Hunyadi now viced his suspicion that Dracul was treasonous, and probably notified the sultan of the planned moves of the army.<sup>50</sup> At this, Vlad Dracul left in anger. Nevertheless, he left his son behind with 4,000 Vallachian soldiers. But the young king would not accept the sober advice of the Vallachian prince. Influenced by Hunyadi and the cardinal, he continued the campaign. No further reinforcements were arriving and the army now consisted of barely 20,000 soldiers.

Ulászló's and Hunyadi's confidence was reinforced by two factors. One was undoubtedly the ease by which their army had won its victories the previous year. The other must have been derived from Condolmieri's assurance that his galleys would prevent the sultan's recrossing to Europe. They also expected the speedy arrival of Skanderbeg and the troops of the Byzantine emperor. They also gained self confidence by the swiftness of their conquest of Nicopolis. They should have been warned by the fact that a small Ottoman detachment was now shadowing their army.<sup>51</sup>

The army moved on south from Nicopolis. In five days it reached Sumla and stopped for a five-day rest. Then it moved on to Provadija, and on November 6<sup>th</sup> it conquered Petrec and two small fortresses. By November 9<sup>th</sup>, the army was at Varna. Hunyadi established his camp north-east of the abandoned city, surrounding the camp with battle wagons. Then the news came like a thunderbolt; Condolmieri reported that the sultan succeeded in crossing over to Europe with his entire Asian army! As proof of the news, by the evening of the same day the distant campfires of the Ottomans could be seen near Petrec in the rear of the Hungarian army.

Historians have argued about Murad II's crossing ever since,<sup>52</sup> placing the blame variously on Condolmieri, the Genoans or the Venetians. But the number of

<sup>48</sup> DĚUGOSZ: Tom. 12, p. 716.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 716-717.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 717.

<sup>51</sup> This was to have serious consequences. According to the Anonymous Ottoman Chronicler in: THŪRY: Történetírók. Tom. 1, p. 58, the bey of Nicopolis followed Ulászló's army and captured several cavalymen who revealed Hunyadi's plans. Thus, the sultan was able to march directly to Varna without losing time, catching up with the Hungarian army within six days after crossing the straights. See also Sead-eddin in THŪRY: Történetírók. Tom. 1, p. 136.

<sup>52</sup> For the actual crossing see the Anonymous Ottoman Chronicler in THŪRY: Történetírók. Tom. 1, p. 59. See also PALATIO, p. 27; DĚUGOSZ: Tom. 12, p. 802; ANGYAL Dávid: Murad útja Várna felé [The Route Murads to Varna]. In: Hadtörténelmi Közlemények 23 (1910), pp. 252-253. According to Wavrin, the news that Genoan ships helped the crossing of the sultan was brought by Venetian spies who masqueraded as Genoans.

galleys assigned to guard the straights was probably inadequate to begin with. The Byzantines, on their part, failed to occupy the European shores of the narrows. Thus, the Ottomans were able to harrass the galleys from both banks, forcing the ships into midstream, where they had to fight against the strong currents. It was rumored, although never conclusively proven, that the Genoans provided barges and crews to transport the Ottoman army to Europe, receiving one gold florin per soldier in the bargain. As it is usually the case with such controversial issues, accusations of treachery abounded but no real proof of it was ever provided.<sup>53</sup>

Being confronted with the new situation, the king's council considered two choices. Caesarini suggested that the army remain enclosed in the wagon-fortress until the arrival of the galleys from the Bosphorus. But no one had any idea if the galleys would ever come to Varna at all.<sup>54</sup> Still expecting the eventual arrival of the Albanians and the Byzantines, the commanders, including Hunyadi, advised the king to stay near the city of Varna and accept battle with the sultan's army. However, the expected help was not coming; the Byzantines were too scared of Murad II, and Skanderbeg was prevented by Branković from joining the Hungarians.

The Serbian despot had, of course, every reason to resent the renewal of the war. He had already regained the Serbian fortresses without encountering serious problems. To lose all this for an uncertain campaign that he knew to have been carelessly prepared, was nothing short of madness. Now was the time for the king and Hunyadi to remember Vlad Dracul's advice and turn back for home. But it was not to be; as Thuróczy stated, they would have been ashamed to turn back without even trying to do battle with the enemy.

Murad II, after the crossing, went directly to Edirne where he hastily summoned all his forces. Then he marched directly to Varna since he had received good intelligence about the plans of the Hungarians from some captured cavalymen. Arriving near Varna, he manouvered his troops to get between the Hungarians and their possible line of retreat. Thus, he left them no choice but to fight.<sup>55</sup>

Hunyadi did not even know the size of the Ottoman army that he was facing. He suggested, therefore, that before anything else was tried, they should find out this vital matter. Since no one could offer a better suggestion, Hunyadi's advice prevailed. The only way to find out was to offer battle.<sup>56</sup>

In fact, the two armies were of unequal strength. Murad's army was reported

<sup>53</sup> FRAKNÓI: *A vármai csata*, p. 379. See also PICCOLOMINI, pp. 488-490. THURY: *A vármai csatáról*, pointed out that Murad II had used the vessels of Giovanni Adomo, the governor of Genoa's Anatolian possessions in 1421, when he faced the rebellion of Mustafa, son of Bayazid. After that, the sultan continued to cultivate his friendship with Adomo, and it is possible that the boats used in 1444 came from his Genoan friend. For this friendship see HAMMER-PURGSTALL *Joseph von: Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*. Vol. 1-10. Pest 1827-1835, here Vol. 1, p. 404.

<sup>54</sup> THURÓCZY: *Tom. 1*, p. 216.

<sup>55</sup> ANGYAL: *Murad*, pp. 252-253.

<sup>56</sup> CALLIMACHUS: *Tom. 1*, pp. 513-514. See also IORGA, pp. 306-307. For the confusion in the Hungarian camp, see CALLIMACHUS: *Tom. 1*, p. 514.

to have been between 60,000 and 100,000 men, as opposed to the 19,000-20,000 soldiers on the Hungarian side. It seems that the corps of janissaries alone were a match in numbers for the entire cavalry of the Hungarians.<sup>57</sup> According to Zotikos (who was, by the way, a better observer than Palatio who provided much of the fantasies of Dlugosz and Callimachus and, not the least, of Prochaska), the attack began by the irregular cavalry of the Ottomans. The Anatolian *akinjis* and *asabs*, stationed on a hill near Varna, suddenly swarmed over the side of the hill and fell upon the right wing of the Hungarian army. The day was November 10<sup>th</sup> 1444. When the first attack was repulsed, the Anatolian beylerbey, Karadsa, moved into the fight. He was opposed by Hunyadi himself who beat back the *spahis*. Karadsa himself was killed.

Then Daud pasha, the beylerbey of Rumeli, led his troops against the left wing of the Hungarians. Hunyadi turned against him and sent his troops fleeing. It seemed that the battle was won against overwhelming odds. Only the janissaries stood their ground. The sultan himself was ready to run away but was restrained by some of his commanders. Zotikos maintained that a janissary grabbed hold of Murad's horse and prevented the sultan's escape.<sup>58</sup> The rest of the following events are very controversial.

It seems that King Ulászló I wisely stayed out of the battle. When it seemed that victory was at hand, some lords in his immediate entourage urged him that he, too, should participate in the fighting. Some supposedly suggested that if he did not fight personally, all the glory would go to Hunyadi.<sup>59</sup> As the chronicler stated, the young king of Hungary and Poland now decided that «it was fit for a king to fight a king». Thus, he led his troops of 500 heavy cavalrymen against the center of the line of the janissaries. His attack carried him through the first line, but soon his horse was cut from behind. He then fell down and his head was cut off by a veteran soldier. It was raised at once on the tip of a lance for all to see.<sup>60</sup> Hunyadi

<sup>57</sup> A Greek eyewitness to the battle, Paraspondylas Zotikos, whose long-winded epic poem first came to the attention of Emile LEGRAND who published it in: *Collection de monuments pour servir à l'étude de la langue néo-hellénique. Nouvelle série. No. 5. Paris 1875, pp.51-84* and whose Hungarian translation was given by PECZ Vilmos: *Zotikos költeménye a vármai csatáról [Zotikos' Poem about the Battle of Varna]*. In: *Századok* 28 (1894), pp. 316-337, erroneously asserted that Hunyadi's army consisted of 40,000 men, while the sultan allegedly had 200,000 soldiers.

<sup>58</sup> PECZ, p. 320.

<sup>59</sup> According to Zotikos, in PECZ, p. 335, a traitor urged the king to intervene. «Who participated in the fighting performing heroic deeds? The blood of the Muslims is trickling down my arms and yet he [Hunyadi] gathers all the fame and glory. We won the world, destroyed the Ottomans, and Murad is now standing alone with his janissaries. And now, the malicious and untrustworthy János wants to perform a minor, insignificant deed, in order to gain the fame and praise of the whole world without valor, only because of his malice [...]» Also DŁUGOSZ: *Tom. 12, pp. 720-733*, based on PALATIO's fantasies.

<sup>60</sup> Andreas Pannonius, in FRANKÓI Vilmos – ÁBEL Jenő (eds.): *Irodalomtörténeti emlékek [Recollections from the History of Literature]*. Vol. 1. Budapest 1886, p. 13, asserted: «When Hunyadi returned from the slaughter, he received the news of the death of the king. He tried to calm the troops,

just returned from the pursuit of the fleeing spahis and he desperately tried to stop the quickly spreading panic.<sup>61</sup> But he did not succeed. The battle was over by the time dusk had settled on Varna. The Hungarian army was thoroughly beaten and its remnants were desperately trying to get as far away from the battlefield as possible.

The sultan's victorious army was, however, in equally bad shape. It was not even sure that victory was achieved. Murad ordered his troops to retire to their camp for the night. Only the following morning did the situation become obvious and, by then, the Hungarians and their allies were long gone. The Ottoman army then entered the abandoned wagon-fortress and butchered the sick and the wounded who were left behind. By then, it was too late to follow the fleeing enemy. Nevertheless, few escaped from Varna. Those who survived the battle died of sickness or were killed by the aroused peasants of the region whom they previously despoiled.

The losses of the Hungarians were staggering. Not only was the valiant young king killed, but Cardinal Caesarini was also among the missing. He was later reported to have escaped from the battle, but was killed either by robbers or, possibly, by the enraged Hungarians who attributed the defeat to him. The Bishops of Nagyvárad and Eger, and the lords István Báthori, Miklós Perényi, Henrik Tamási and Gregory of Sztropka were all dead. The losses of the Ottomans were equally serious. The sultan later added to the losses by having the officers whose troops ran away from the battle executed.

Varna had even greater political consequences than what the losses would indicate. It virtually insured Ottoman domination of most of the Balkan peninsula and the eventual fall of the city of Constantinople. If there ever was a chance to save the Byzantine capital from Ottoman conquest, it was at Varna. After that, it was only a matter of time for Constantinople to fall to the Ottomans.

Hunyadi himself escaped. However, for a time afterward he was content with defending the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary only. Few would believe from that time on that the Ottomans could ever be expelled from Europe.

Bickering over the responsibility for the defeat was to continue for centuries to come. Some were to say that it was the punishment of God for breaking a solemn oath by the king. Others were to accuse Hunyadi of cowardice, a charge for which there was no evidence whatsoever.<sup>62</sup> However, the causes of the defeat were quite obvious. They included the vacillation of most of the great lords to go to war in the first place, and the almost lighthearted, casual preparation for the campaign. They also included the unfulfilled promises of the pope, the Western

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but the soldiers lost heart and ran away.»

<sup>61</sup> See Hunyadi's letter to Pope Eugene IV in SCHWANDTNER: Tom. 2, pp. 17-20. The observations of LAONICOS, pp. 335-336 jibe with Pannonius' account. Wavrin, in KROPP, pp. 884-887, mentioned that when Ulászló I decided to challenge the janissaries, Hunyadi tried to dissuade him. But this is wrong, since Hunyadi was away on the left wing when the king died.

<sup>62</sup> According to PALATIO, pp. 459-469. But Palatio also stated that Ulászló I had cut down and killed Murad II in the battle! This certainly exhibits his true «credibility» as an eyewitness.

monarchs, and the Byzantine Emperor; the inadequacy of the naval force guarding the straits; the failure of the Byzantine army to occupy the western shores of the narrows, and the inability of Skanderbeg to join the Hungarians. Not the least guilty was Branković who interfered with the Albanians and who himself refused to join the new campaign for which he so strongly argued the previous year.

Above all, the leaders of the campaign, especially Hunyadi, must bear a major share of the responsibility for the defeat. He, together with the young king, was overconfident. The propaganda which they generated about the overwhelming success of the Long Campaign the previous year, and the apparent chance for breaking the Ottoman hold on the Balkans once and for all, was too well done. It even fooled them into believing their own propaganda. Consequently, they underestimated the ability of the Ottoman empire to defend itself. Only Sultan Murad II emerged from this sordid episode as a true statesman, and if historical justice had ever any meaning, then his resounding victory was fully deserved.