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AN ITALIAN ACCOUNT OF THE HUNGARIAN
PEASANT REVOLT OF 1514

One of the most important events of Hungarian history is the great peasants' war of 1514. Stephen Taurinus' poem on its events, the *Stauromachia* of 1519, is well-known. Less well-known, indeed largely ignored, is a contemporary account by an Italian humanist, Giano Vitale. His *De Ungarorum cruciata facta anno MDXIII et de infanda saevitia utrinque patrata et de nostrorum temporum invidia* was printed in Rome in 1514¹.

A brief account of the revolt is necessary. Pope Leo X had appointed the Hungarian cardinal Tamás Bakócz legate a latere and charged him "to organise the holy and most necessary crusade against the Turks and Tartars"². In early summer large numbers of peasants took the cross and gathered in Pest³. Few nobles joined, however, and though Bakócz appointed as leader a minor noble, George Dózsa, disquiet about the growing host of directionless peasants grew. By the time that Bakócz was persuaded to suspend the crusade, on 23 May, the crusade had gone awry. The charismatic Dózsa (about whom we know regrettably little) made a speech declaring an intention to overthrow the aristocracy and end oppression of the peasantry. The army of peasants turned against the feudal lords, killing the bishop of Csanád, and laid siege to the city of Temesvár. The king and aristocracy were helpless, and the revolt was suppressed only when János Zápolyai, the voivode of Transylvania, led the border army to relieve Temesvár. Although some groups of peasants held out, the relief of Temesvár was the effective end of the revolt. On 15 July Dózsa was put to death, with cruelty harsh even for the period: crowned "King of the Hungarians" with a red-hot metal crown

¹ Reprinted in *Iani Francisci Vitalis Rubimonti Panormitani Opera*, ed. G. Speciale, Palermo 1816, pp. 335-346 (inaccurately), in *Analecta monumentorum Hungariae historicarum literariorum maxima inedita*, I, ed. F. Toldy, Budapest 1986, pp. 201-208 (reissue of Pest 1862 ed.), and in *Monumenta rusticorum rebellium anno MDXIV*, ed. A. Fekete Nagy et al., Budapest 1979, pp. 242-245.

² The papal brief making Bakócz legate is printed in *Monumenta rusticorum rebellium*, pp. 32-34. The most accessible account of the revolt is in M. D. Birnbaum, *Humanists in a Shattered World. Croatian and Hungarian Latinity in the sixteenth century* (UCLA Slavic Studies 15), Columbus, Ohio, 1986, pp. 17-32.

³ The indulgence issued by Bakócz is printed in G. Borsa, "Bakócz Tamás nyomtatott búcsúlevele az 1514. évi keresztes hadjárat hirdetéséhez ["Indulgence printed by B. T. for the 1514 crusade"]", *Magyar Könyvszemle*, XCIII, 1977, pp. 213-221.

while his followers were forced to eat his roasting flesh. In many ways akin to other late-medieval peasant revolts, the Hungarian revolt was distinguished by its scale and ferocity, and by the coherent programme of its leaders.

The first news of trouble reached Rome at the beginning of July, when the Venetian ambassador there reported that "... quelli popoli erano sublevati contra li prelati et nobili et erano più de 50 mila... quel regno era in grande combustio". Almost immediately a letter from King Vladislas confirmed the worst: an "atrox et funestum vixque ullo seculo auditum facinus..."⁴.

Giano Vitale, author of the *De Ungarorum cruciata*, had arrived in Rome from his native Sicily in 1511 and soon became part of the humanistic circle associated with Johann Goritz and the church of Sant'Agostino⁵. He quickly made his mark with poetry and other occasional pieces: panegyrics of Imperia, the mistress of Agostino Chigi, and of Matteo Lang, ambassador of Maximilian at the Lateran Council; a prose letter and verses on the entry of the newly elected Leo X to St John Lateran in 1513⁶.

He himself explains the inspiration for the *De Ungarorum cruciata* in a letter dated 13 November 1514 to Giovanni Battista Piso of Ferrara, printed at the beginning of the edition. Piso was a humanist and teacher in Ferrara; four years later Celio Calcagnini corresponded with him from Hungary and sent one of Bakócz's nephews to study with him in Ferrara⁷. Vitale writes that Angelo Dovizi had reminded him that he was to send "aliquid novi" to Piso and he was therefore sending a topical piece, his report on "the great revolt of the Hungarians"⁸. Angelo Dovizi was an apostolic protonotary in Rome and nephew to the prominent cardinal Bernardo Dovizi⁹.

Why should Vitale choose to write about the Hungarian peasants' revolt? In his title he chose to emphasise its crusading origins. Throughout his career he was much exercised by the need for a crusade, writing an *exhortatio contra Thurcas* for Charles V. The year before the *De Ungarorum cruciata* he had published a short work on portents which is imbued with a sense of the tragic dismemberment

⁴ Pietro Lando, 2 July 1514. *Monumenta rusticorum rebellium*, pp. 141, 142. See also Sanudo, *Diarii*, XVIII, Venice 1887, col. 329.

⁵ Vitale contributed to the *Coryciana*, verses by various humanists dedicated to Goritz, published in Rome 1524. See in G. Tumminello, "Giano Vitale umanista del secolo XVI", *Archivio storico siciliano*, n. s., VIII, 1883, pp. 1-94 (5-26) (the sole study of Vitale). Some of Vitale's writings were printed by Speciale (see note 1).

⁶ *Imperiae Panegyricus*, [Rome? 1512], *Panegyris R. D. Mathei [Longi] Episcopi Gurcensis*, [Rome? 1512], *Carme per l'entrata in Roma di Leone X*, [Rome 1513].

⁷ Letter of 13 August 1518, and two undated, *Opera aliquot*, Basel 1544, pp. 90, 91-92, 97.

⁸ "Dumque illam [Elegiam] legerem, ab Angelo Dovizio, quem ob ingenium et praeclaram indolem in omnibus admirari cogor, commonitus sum ut aliquid novi ad te mitterem, quam rem ab eo tu per litteras contenderas, ego autem verbis ac iussis eius obsecutus tibi Ungarorum ingentem seditionem legendam mitto. Tu autem apud te conticesce, ut si quid ultra ea quae ibi scripta sunt memoria dignum eveniat, addere possim." *De Ungarorum cruciata*, fol. aii.

⁹ L. Ferrari, *Onomasticon. Repertorio bio-bibliografico degli scrittori italiani dal 1501 al 1850*, Milan 1947, p. 282.

of Christendom; in it he compares the missing hands and head of a monstrous birth to the realms lost by Rome and apostrophises Leo X to restore Christendom to its whole ¹⁰.

Shortly before Vitale's arrival in Rome, Cardinal Bakócz had created a great impression by his entry into Rome "con pompa grandissima" ¹¹. This may have roused Vitale's awareness of matters Hungarian. A further link was the involvement of Bernardo Dovizi in the acquisition of lodgings in Rome for Bakócz ¹².

It is also noteworthy that the verse letter *De nostrorum temporum invidia* printed at the end of the *De Ungarorum cruciata* is addressed to Egidius of Viterbo, who was then much exercised by the Ottoman threat to Hungary. This is apparent from the passionate speech he gave to the Lateran Council: "With my own eyes I have seen the Turks come right up to the outskirts of my episcopal seat of Split...destroying everything with fire and sword" ¹³. The friendship suggested by Vitale's dedication of the letter to Egidius would have made him well aware of the problem of the Turks and of the crusade.

Vitale may also have had literary reasons for an interest in Hungary. It has been demonstrated that he used images from the then unpublished poetry of Janus Pannonius, the renowned Hungarian neo-Latin poet; he must therefore have had access to Janus' work. (An acquaintanceship which incidentally is valuable evidence for the *fama* of Janus). Vitale's recently discovered poem *Roma instaurata* compares the birth of Rome out of the ashes of Troy to the birth of the phoenix from its own ashes. The phoenix comparison is common, but a new element introduced by Vitale, the notion of Rome being reborn not the same, but greater, is found elsewhere only in Janus' *De Roma* ¹⁴.

The most likely source for Vitale's knowledge of Janus Pannonius' poems was the great patron and collector Angelo Colocci, the dominant figure in Roman humanist circles at that time, who possessed manuscript copies of Pannonius' verses (MS. Vat. Lat. 2847 and Ott. Lat. 2860) and even planned to publish some of his verses. To this end he annotated Vat. Lat. 2847 and wrote notes for a life of Pannonius ¹⁵.

In style, the *De Ungarorum cruciata* is brisk and direct; in his prefatory letter

¹⁰ *Teratorizion*. See F. Ascarelli, *Annali tipografici di Giacomo Mazzocchi*, Florence 1961, p. 82.

¹¹ The remark is of Evangelista Maddaleni de' Capodifero (MS Vat. Lat. 3351, f. 186).

¹² *Epistolario di Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena*, ed. G.L. Moncallo, Florence 1955, pp. 268, 390.

¹³ "Vidi ego oculis propriis, vidi inquam eos [Turcas] usque ad suburbia Archipraesulatus mei spalatensis...omnia igni ferroque devastantes..." *Oratio prima Synodi Lateranensis habita*, printed 6 November 1512. Quoted by A. Apponyi, *Hungarica*, vol. I, Munich 1903, pp. 64-65.

¹⁴ G. H. Tucker, "Le portrait de Rome chez Pannonius et Vitalis: une mise au point", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, XLVIII, 1986, pp. 751-756. See also R. Skyrme, "Buscas en Roma a Rome". Quevedo "Vitalis and Janus Pannonius", *ibid.*, XLIV, 1982, pp. 363-367.

¹⁵ J. Huszti, "Humanista kézírati tanulmányok II. Angelo Colocci Janus Pannonius tanulmányai" ("Studies of humanist manuscripts II. Angelo Colocci's study of Janus Pannonius"), *Acta litterarum ac scientiarum Reg. Universitatis Hung. Franciscus-Iosephinae. Sectio philologica*, V fasc. 3, Szeged 1934, pp. 65-79. For Colocci see *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. XXVII, pp. 105-111.

Vitale declares that he has adopted a familiar unadorned style ¹⁶. Such a style, evocative of Caesar, was appropriate to the military subject, but it suggests too that the account was written in haste, in order to catch the popular interest.

At the beginning of the *De Ungarorum cruciata* is a full-page woodcut of a northern soldier brandishing a flag on which is depicted the Crucifixion with the Virgin and St John. This alludes, as we shall see, to a decisive episode of the crusade. The account begins with the creation of Bakócz as legate a latere and his preaching of the crusade. Peasants flock to take up the cross, and two groups form, one led by Melchior Mouder, who calls himself “the enemy of prelates and of all leaders of the Hungarian kingdom”, the other by George Siculus, or Székely (George Dózsa). The Siculi, or Székelys, were an ethnic group akin to the Hungarians living in Transylvania. Vitale, a Sicilian, explains this and avoids the common confusion with also siculi. The peasants embark on the burning and pillaging of the *villae* of the nobles. Alarmed, Bakócz calls off the crusade and orders this to be proclaimed throughout the country. Here and elsewhere Vitale presumes total ignorance about Hungary in his audience, helpfully explaining that Pest is “a city of Pannonia”. Likewise Várad is “a city of Pannonia” and Buda is “Urbs regia” or “Regni sedes”.

The peasants waver, and decide to raise two standards with crucifixes on them; those deciding to return to their villages are to gather by one, those deciding to continue by the other. But as those choosing to return home gather under their crucifix, its bindings loosen and it falls face down on the ground. This happens three times. At this sign of God’s will the peasants continue with the “crusade”. An aristocrat is killed, impaled with a stake, then a wealthy merchant called Ruppi. The peasants defeat the nobles in battle, and five hundred nobles fall. All this time the peasants avoid doing harm to the poor, limiting themselves to requisitioning the food they need.

After two preachers seek unsuccessfully to recall the people to their duty, the king launches an attack on the rebels. Vitale’s account of their atrocities, and in particular the lament he puts in the mouth of the victims, draws on the language of descriptions of the fall of Constantinople and the anti-Turkish crusading literature of the second half of the fifteenth century. This in turn comes from the classic historical descriptions of the horrors of war for the vanquished: “finished and noble phrases on ... the wretched fate of the conquered ... in short, arms and corpses everywhere, gore and grief” ¹⁷.

A noble called Michael Dacius goes over to the peasants, now 100,000 strong; the bishop of Zagreb is killed and many *principes* and *prelates* impaled. The king and “Ioannes Vaivola” (a misreading or mishearing of “vaivoda”, governor) gather forces and defeat the rebels, who are horribly put to death.

¹⁶ “Rem enim nunc ut potui spatiis exclusus iniquis absque alio orationis ornatu descripsi, et admodum familiariter.” *De Ungarorum cruciata*, fol. aii r.

¹⁷ Sallust, *The War with Catiline*, L, 9, trans. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library, p. 91.

What were Vitale's sources? His account includes specific details — names, numbers, speeches, chronology — as well as generalised description which might be applicable to any outrage, and he evidently depended on written sources or informants or both. A mistake he makes would cast light on his sources: he states that the captured rebels were taken to Buda for execution, whereas in fact the executions took place in the city of Temesvár, as all the other sources note¹⁸. It may simply be, however, that Vitale presumed that the city entered by the victor in triumphant Roman style, “*magnis cum triumphis*”, was the capital, “*Buda regia*”.

Living in Rome, Vitale was well placed to gain information about the events in Hungary as the presence of papal envoys and resident ambassadors meant that ample reports were sent. He must have used accounts such as the letter of 11 August from Nicolò de Zuanne in Buda to Cristoforo Morosini in Venice, recorded on 4 September by Sanudo. In it Nicolò gave the whole history of the revolt and, like Vitale, dwells on the “*cose terribili e stupende*” of the manner of death of the nobles and the rebels¹⁹. There are no parallels between the *De Ungarorum cruciata* and the reports of the Venetian ambassador in Rome, Pietro Quirino, suggesting that both relied on similar sources of information: the title which the rebel leader gave himself, for example, is very similar in both²⁰.

German broadsheets about the revolt were a principal source of information for the revolt. Seven versions survive, and are listed by Gedeon Borsa²¹. Their common origin is a letter from a German in Buda written on 25 May²². Six are entitled *Ein gross Wunderzeichen* (various spellings), one *Die auffur so geschehen is im Ungerlandt, mit dem Creützern*; they were printed in Augsburg, Nuremberg and Munich, all cities with commercial and family links with the German communities in Hungary and Transylvania²³.

¹⁸ A. Ballagi, *Buda és Pest a világirodalomban, 1473-1711*, vol. I (no more published), Budapest 1925, p. 119.

¹⁹ *Monumenta rusticomum rebellium*, pp. 192-193; Sanudo, *Diarii*, X, col. 17.

²⁰ 7 and 12 July, *Monumenta rusticomum rebellium*, pp. 150, 157: “Io Melchior Vansar eletto re del popolo benedetto delli cruciati, amico del re de Ungaria et inimico dei prelati, baroni et nobeli”. *De Ungarorum cruciata*: “Melchior dei gratia Rex benedicti populi Cruciferorum, amicus et subiectus Ladislai Ungariae, Boemiae que Regis et Electus ... et inimicus Praelatorum & omnium Pannonio praesidentium Regno” (fol. aii v).

²¹ “A magyarországi parasztháborúról szóló német kiadások és azok nyomdászai” (“The German printed accounts of the Hungarian peasants’ war and their printers”), *Magyar Könyvszemle*, C, 1984, pp. 24-33, with German synopsis. The texts are in *Monumenta rusticomum rebellium*, pp. 313-321. *Ain groß Wunderzaech das do geschehen ist durch da Creütz das ein Cardinal had außgeben inn dem gantzen Hungerischen Land wider die Turcken* is printed in *Analecta monumentorum Hungariae historicorum*, ed. Toldy, pp. 209-212. See also Ballagi, *Buda és Pest*, pp. 111-114.

²² A number of such letters, especially those to German princes, survive. See *Monumenta rusticomum rebellium, passim*.

²³ Cf. U.M. Schwob, *Kulturelle Beziehungen zwischen Nürnberg und den Deutschen im Südosten im 14. bis 17. Jahrhundert* (Buchreihe der Südostdeutschen historischen Kommission, Band 22), Munich 1969.

It is most unlikely that Vitale knew German but, as we have seen, he was closely associated with two German-speakers, Maximilian's ambassador, Matteo Lang, and Johann Goritz, and he could have picked up information from either circle.

There are a number of similarities between Vitale's account and the various German *Wunderzeichen*. Vitale's story about the miraculous prostration of the crucifix which was to beckon men homewards appears, as far as I can discover, in no source except for the *Wunderzeichen*. Moreover, allowing for the difference in language, the accounts are identical²⁴. In addition, the oddly low figure of 5,000 for the number of peasants responding to the call to crusade appears in both the *Wunderzeichen* and the *De Ungarorum cruciata*. A wild misspelling, that of Parcamesa for the magnate Bornemisza, similarly implies the German exemplar (which has Parkamesa)²⁵.

Vitale used, therefore, the original *Wunderzeichen* or one of its derivatives. It is possible to narrow down which version he used as he mentions the killing by the peasants of a wealthy German merchant. Vitale gives his name as Ruppi, a name found in only one surviving broadsheet, the *Die auffur so geschehen ist im Ungerlandt, mit den Creützern* (in the others he is Kuppi/Kuppy, or Ruppy). This particular broadsheet survives in three copies, one of which is in the library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (pressmark RM. IV. 88; number VII of Borsa's catalogue)²⁶. The wording of the challenge Michael Dacius sent to King Vladislas, that he would accept only one king, one bishop and two lords in the land, and would extirpate the others, is also virtually identical to that in this version²⁷.

Vitale, however, seems to have had available to him not just one, but two German accounts. The woodcut on the title-page of the *De Ungarorum cruciata* shows a northern mercenary with an ample moustache, clad in armour and with a plume in his hat, who stands facing us, gazing towards us and slightly to his right. In his left hand he carries a sword, in his right he holds aloft a banner with the Crucifixion and the Virgin and St John, alluding to the first episode of the crusade/revolt²⁸.

²⁴ "Praeterea duo vexilla erecta sunt, illisque crucifixi imago lignea alligatur, factumque est ut si qui prosequi mallent alterum duorum proficiscerentur et sic et contra. Hac via opinio omnium patuit, multo enim plures sunt, qui repugnant velle prosequi, quam qui mallent..." (*De Ungarorum cruciata*, fol. aiii r-v). "Haben in selbs zway fenlen gesteckt und an yeglichs ain crucifix gemacht und lasen aussruffen: welcher bei inen bleyben und mit dem creutz ziehen woll der sol zu dem ainem fannen treten; welcher dann wider haym ziehen woll, der soll zu dem andern fannen treten. Also sein der dye wider haym haben wollen ziehen viel meer dann der andern gewest..." (*Monumenta rusticorum rebellium*, pp. 315-316).

²⁵ *De Ungarorum cruciata*, fol. aiii r.; *Wunderzeichen*, p. 210.

²⁶ Borsa, "A parasztháborúról...kiadásai", p. 25. It is version D in the *Monumenta rusticorum rebellium*, pp. 313-321. The other two copies are in Halle, Universitätsbibliothek (pressmark QK II n 4622) and in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August-Bibliothek (pressmark 198.13 Hist. [2]).

²⁷ *De Ungarorum cruciata*, aiii a; *Monumenta rusticorum rebellium*, p. 320.

²⁸ Reproduced in Ascarelli, *Giacomo Mazzocchi*, fig. 85, pp. 87.

However, the woodcut on the title-page of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences version (VII in Borsa) of the *Wunderzeichen*, which Vitale used, is entirely unrelated to the image in the *De Ungarorum cruciata*; it depicts Dózsa's punishment on the red-hot iron throne²⁹. The other versions all have a woodcut of a northerner bearing a banner with the Crucifixion, one of which is identical to the woodcut of the *De Ungarorum cruciata* (IV in Borsa)³⁰. Of the others, three (I, II, VI) have a woodcut of a peasant, not a soldier, wearing simple clothes and a hood and holding a banner³¹, and one (V) a woodcut which is indeed of a northern soldier, but of one with fashionably full sleeves and an extravagant cluster of plumes in his hat, who steps elegantly forward³².

Vitale, then, and his printer, must have had available two accounts: the *Die auffur so geschehen is im Ungerlant, mit den Creützern*, printed in Nuremberg, and *Ein gross wunderzaychen*, probably also printed in Nuremberg³³.

The final influence on Vitale in the *De Ungarorum cruciata* was classical. Despite the unliterary style of its sources, and the haste with which it was written, the *De Ungarorum cruciata* is coloured by Vitale's classical learning. An example is the long list of the classical Latin names of the places of origin of the peasants in the crusade. As the neat alphabetical order suggests, it is lifted from a classical source, Pliny's description of Pannonia in his *Natural History* (3.25)³⁴. In addition, Vitale's phrases occasionally have a classical ring, although they appear not to be direct quotations: "Sed vana est sine viribus ira"; "Haec tamen sola vox morientibus hominibus frequens erat"; "Cives vestri sumus"; "Hinc magna apud plebem cum nobilebus seditio exorta est". Certainly conflict between aristocracy and plebs, the aspect Vitale chooses to accent, was a common theme for Roman historians.

The circumstances of the publication of *De Ungarorum cruciata* suggest that there was an eager readership. An indignant letter inserted before the account tells us of the (successful?) attempt to publish a pirated edition. On 30 November 1514, Pietro Fedrino writes to Francesco Aquila of Benevento to tell him how he

²⁹ Borsa, "A parasztháborúról...kiadásai", p. 27. Reproduced in L. Geréb, *Bibliográfia a hazai parasztlázadások verses és elbeszélő irodalmához (XV-XVIII. század)* [Bibliography of the Poetry and Prose of Hungarian Peasant Revolts (15th. to 18th. Centuries)], (Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár, Tanulmányok, XXIII), Budapest 1949, fig. 5. I have not been able to consult his *A magyar parasztháborúk irodalma (1438-1514)* [The Literature of the Hungarian Peasant Wars], Budapest 1950.

³⁰ Borsa, "A parasztháborúról...kiadásai", p. 27. Reproduced in *Uj Magyar Lexikon*, V, Budapest 1961, pp. 368-369.

³¹ Borsa, "A parasztháborúról...kiadásai", pp. 27-28. It has been reproduced several times (for full details see Borsa, p. 27n.), for example in L. Geréb, *A magyar parasztháborúk irodalma*, Budapest 1950, p. 105, *Uj Magyar Lexikon*, V, Budapest 1961, pp. 368-369.

³² Reproduced in Borsa, "A parasztháborúról...kiadásai", fig. 1, p. 28.

³³ For the evidence for place of printing, Borsa, "A parasztháborúról...kiadásai", p. 29.

³⁴ C. Plinius Secundus *Naturalis Historiae libri XXXVII*, ed. C. Mayhoff, Leipzig 1906, vol. I, pp. 292-293. *De Ungarorum cruciata*, fol. aii r. To draw on Pliny for so unfamiliar a region was standard: Pietro Ransano gives the same list (Petrus Ransanus, *Epithoma rerum Hungararum*, ed. P. Kulcsár, Budapest 1977, p. 57).

has been given a manuscript copy of their friend Vitale's "historia, seu mavis epistola" by his friends Domenico Lelio from Rome and Lucio Gabriele Rubimontio from Naples. Fedrino stuffs it down his shirt next to his skin where it could be seen, "ut moris est mei", and goes to call on Giacomo Mazzocchi, "bookseller to the Academy". Mazzocchi notices the manuscript and borrows it from the unwary Fedrino, promising to return it immediately. But when Fedrino goes back for it, he finds it already printed. "I doubt that Giano will suffer this gladly", he tells Aquila³⁵.

Giacomo Mazzocchi was one of the best-known printers in Rome, publishing some sixty books between 1506 and 1523. I can discover no copies of this unauthorised edition. If it was indeed printed, it is odd that no copies have survived, especially as several copies of the authorised edition are extant³⁶. There is, however, an exactly parallel case as another Mazzocchi edition of these years appears not to have survived³⁷. It seems probable that Mazzocchi did print the *De Ungarorum cruciata*, but until an example is discovered it is impossible to be certain.

The authorised edition — our one — bears no printer's name. The type is that of the Roman printer Silber, but the situation is complicated by the fact that Mazzocchi and the Silbers occasionally collaborated: Marcello Silber edited some works which were printed by Mazzocchi, and Mazzocchi is known to have borrowed Silber's type³⁸. However, every Mazzocchi edition which uses Silber's type bears Mazzocchi's name in the colophon, unlike our edition, which does not even carry Mazzocchi's usual symbol of a branch or a double cross with the initials I and M³⁹. Silber had published verses by Vitale in 1514, the year of *De*

³⁵ "A Dominico Lelio Romano et Lucio Gabriele Rubimontio Neapolitano amicissimis mihi Iani Vitalis Panormitani nostri historia seu mavis Epistola de Ungarorum Crucis evocatione impertita fuit. Cumque eam (ut moris est mei) inter vestem et pectus ferrem ita ut videretur, Iacobi Mazochi Achademiae Bibliopolae deveni aedes, qui, visa papyro, subito, me incauto, eam abstulit se quamprimum redditurum mihi pollicitus; cumque pro ea redirem, Typis [sic] iam effectam inveni. Credo hanc rem Ianum non equo animo passurum. Tibi mi Aquila hoc laboris relinquo paca eum, sed Graeco utere astu Homericumque Ulysssem imitare, qui utriusque linguae eruditissimus es, eumque ut ita dicam imbarca." *De Ungarorum cruciata*, fol. ai r. A Dominicus Lelius (from Belluno, however), edited the *Carmina* of Filippo Beroaldo, published Rome 1530 (M. Cosenza, *Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary of the Italian Humanists*, vol. III, 1893). I can discover nothing about Fedrino, Aquila or Rubimontio.

³⁶ Hain and the *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in Italy...in the British Museum* (London, 1958, p. 888) have nothing which could be attributed to Mazzocchi. There are copies of the authorised version in the British Library (pressmark 4570. c. 28[1]), the Biblioteca Corsiniana in Rome (171. K. 14./11), and the National Library in Budapest; Ballagi (*Buda és Pest*, p. 120) also notes copies in Venice (Biblioteca Marciana) and Seville (the Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina), and Apponyi (*Hungarica*, III, 1925, p. 75) one in an unnamed private collection.

³⁷ A first edition of Cipriano Benet's *De prima orbis sede*, which is attested by a later edition (A. Tinto, *Gli Annali Tipografici di Eucario e Marcello Silber (1501-1527)*, Florence 1968, p. 200. Tinto notes that "dobbiamo però riconoscere che della prima edizione mazzocchiana non siamo riusciti a trovar traccia né nelle biblioteche, né nei repertori").

³⁸ Ascarelli, *Giacomo Mazzocchi*, p. 16.

³⁹ Illustrated in Ascarelli, *Giacomo Mazzocchi*, pp. 16, 17.

Ungarorum cruciata ⁴⁰. Our edition was published by Silber, perhaps in haste after an unauthorised edition by Mazzocchi had appeared ⁴¹. Such cut-throat practice was characteristic of what has been called the “transient, hazardous and ruthless world” of early printing ⁴². Mazzocchi included at least one forged inscription in his *Epigrammata antiquae urbis* (1521), which suggests that his business ethics may have been flexible ⁴³.

Our edition of the *De Ungarorum cruciata* bears no date. Vitale must have completed it, or been near to completion, by 13 November, when he sent a copy to Piso for comment. The prefatory letter from Fedrino is dated 30 November and the creation of Bakócz as legate in 1513 is mentioned as having occurred “superiori anno”; together these suggest that the *De Ungarorum cruciata* was printed in December of 1514.

Who were the readers of *De Ungarorum cruciata* and what was their response? We know that one copy was acquired by Marin Sanudo in Venice, who inserted it into his diary of events ⁴⁴. Mazzocchi’s apparent attempt to pirate Vitale’s account suggests a public eager to read of the revolt. It is an early example of the broadsheet, *avvisi* type of publication, appealing to the growing appetite for news ⁴⁵.

Much of its appeal derived from the taste for gruesome narratives, particularly in an era when spectators flocked to watch brutal scenes of combat. The second part of Vitale’s title, *The Unspeakable Atrocities Carried Out By Both Sides*, suggests that this was a major attraction. Vitale dwells with voyeuristic detail on the fate of the nobles killed, impaled with forks and agricultural implements, and the ghastly punishment of the peasants themselves. Moreover, the prefatory woodcut of the swaggering soldier conjured up before the Italian audience the alarming image of the northern soldier, which they had seen for themselves when Maximilian’s army had descended in 1508.

There was also the shocked fascination of hearing of the world turned upside down by the abominable attacks from the peasants and their outrageous claims, typified by the message their *summus rex* sent to King Vladislas: “he would not allow more than one king, one prelate and two lords in the kingdom of Hungary; the rest he intended to extirpate”. For readers and listeners such upheavals imperilled social order. Cristoforo Marcello, archbishop of Corfu, two years later, summed up the prevailing attitude: it had been “tam dira tamque crudelis et truculenta

⁴⁰ In Diogo [sic] Pacecho, *In obedientia pro Emanuele Lusitanae rege Leoni X oratio*, [Rome 1514] into, Silber, p. 100.

⁴¹ As Tinto, Silber, p. 201, cautiously puts forward as a possibility.

⁴² M. Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius. Business and scholarship in Renaissance Venice*, Oxford 1979, p. 9.

⁴³ A dedication to the Emperor Gordian, lifted wholesale from the life of Gordian. F.F. Abbott, “Some spurious inscriptions and their authors”, *Classical Philology*, III, 1908, pp. 22-30 (24).

⁴⁴ *Diarii*, XIX, cols. 99-103.

⁴⁵ Cf. T. Bulgarelli, *Gli avvisi a stampa in Roma nel Cinquecento*, Rome 1967, though the examples given are all later.

seditio”⁴⁶. Hungarians who wrote of the revolt, both contemporaries and those of a generation later, were equally horrified at the challenge to the social order⁴⁷.

Vitale describes the death of Dózsa, crowned with a red-hot iron crown, then dismembered and disembowelled, as not only *atrox* but also *merita*. With the sense of moral disapproval of such social upheaval, the choice of the space-filling verses at the end, *De nostrorum temporum invidia*, was not fortuitous for it is the cardinal sin of *invidia*, envy, which lies behind social upheaval.

Another contemporary comment on the revolt echoes Vitale’s response. No sooner had news of the gruesome execution of Dózsa reached Germany than a correspondent of Willibald Pirckheimer, in a tirade against local malefactors, wished that they too could be “rostiti et inspidati et squartati”⁴⁸. The response to the great German Peasants’ War of 1524-25, ten years later — summed up by the title of Luther’s tract, *Against the Murdering, Thieving Hordes of the Peasants* — provides a convenient comparison. It should be remembered that it is in this period that the “peasant satire” emerges both in literature and in art.

The sole apparent exception to the prevailing sense of outrage is the ambivalent “Column of Victory for the Subjugation of the Peasants”, designed by Albrecht Dürer, where a dejected peasant stabbed in the back sits on top of a monument decked with agricultural implements and a cage of cocks, recalling the instruments of the Passion⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ *De sumenda in Turcas provincia oratio*, [Rome 1516] (the battle of Marignano of 1515 is referred to as “superiori anno”). I quote from Apponyi, *Hungarica*, III, 1925, pp. 78-79 (79).

⁴⁷ Birnbaum (as note 2), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Letter of Lorenz Behaim, 31 July 1514, in *Willibald Pirckheimer’s Briefwechsel*, ed. E. Reicke, II, Munich 1956, p. 451; the allusion to Hungary was first noted by G. Székely, “Egy német humanista és az 1514. évi magyarországi megtorlás” (“A German humanist and the reprisals of 1514 in Hungary”), *Századok*, LXXXVIII, 1964, pp. 377-382.

⁴⁹ Illustrated in *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer*, ed. W. Kurth, New York, 1963, p. 336. Another parallel is the literary reaction to the Sack of Rome in 1527 by barbarian northerners.