Mohács 500

A Narrative of the Fights of the Hungarian Kingdom against the Ottomans, 1389–1718



"The light of our ancestors serves no other purpose for us than to ensure that we run the course of our lives by the light of a burning torch; neither we nor our deeds shall remain in darkness; if we conduct ourselves well, everyone will immediately see us in that light; if we conduct ourselves poorly, we cannot escape being pointed out."

(Miklós Zrínyi, 1620–1664)

ESN EUROPE OF SOVEREIGN NATIONS

Zsuzsanna Borvendég

Milan Uhrík

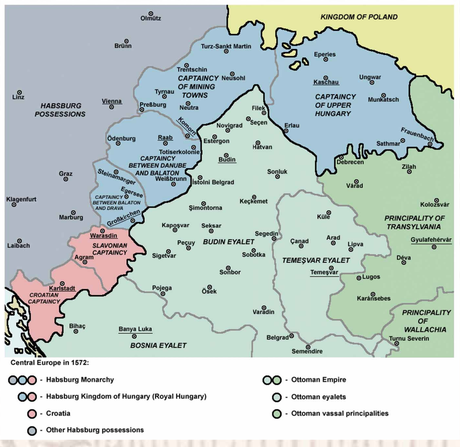
Milestones: Chronolgy

In the 14th century, the Ottoman Empire expanded into the Balkans. It's symbolic date is 1389, the Battle of Kosovo Field, in which the Ottomans defeated the Serbian army. As a result, the Ottoman Empire became a neighbor of the Kingdom of Hungary. The crusaders of King Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437) suffered defeat at the Battle of Nicopolis (1396), after which a strategy of active offense was replaced by defense: the organization of buffer states in the Balkans and the establishment of a system of southern border fortresses. The center of the latter, the gateway to the country, was Nándorfehérvár (nowadays Belgrade). Baron János Hunyadi (the "Turk-beater" d. 1456) was unable to secure victory in several campaigns having led the Balkans (1444 at Varna, 1448 at the Second Battle of Kosovo Field). However, the Ottoman advance was halted twice at Nándorfehérvár, in 1440 and 1456. Hunyadi was the hero of the latter victory. His son, King Mátyás (the "Just," 1458–1490), generally sought peace with the Ottomans. During his reign, Pál Kinizsi, the Bailiff of Temes, and István Báthori, the Voivode of Transylvania, routed the Ottoman troops plundering Transylvania at Kenyérmező (1479).

After Mátyás's death, the Jagiellonian dynasty ruled the Kingdom of Hungary, with Władysław II (1490–1516) and Louis II (1516–1526). During the latter's reign, Nándorfehérvár was gone (1521) and the Battle of Mohács was lost (1526). This was followed by a civil war between the two Hungarian rulers, János Szapolyai (1526–1540) and Ferdinand I of Habsburg (1526–1564). In 1541, Suleiman the Magnificent took advantage of the situation and captured Buda Castle (1541), a symbolic date marking the division of the Kingdom of Hungary into three parts. This process was formalized by the Second Peace of Adrianople (1568). The three parts of the Kingdom – Royal Hungary, the Territory under Ottoman Rule, and the Principality of Transylvania – were reunited under Habsburg rule only after the liberation of Buda in 1686, and the Ottomans completely and permanently withdrew from the country by the Treaty of Pozsarevác in 1718.



Adam Stefanović: The Battle at Kosovo Field (1870)
Source: wikipedia



Hungary in Three Parts
Source: wikipedia



Sébastien Mamerot: The Battle at Nicopolis (1472–1475)
Source: wikipedia



The Battle at Varna in a Chronicle (1564)
Source: wikipedia

Benczúr, Gyula:The Recapture of Buda(1896)
Source: wikipedia



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Precedents: the Way to Mohács

Mátyás I Hunyadi, “the Just” (1458–1490), died in 1490. In the Hungarian collective consciousness, he is perhaps the greatest king of the country. His reign has been described as just, centralist, or even absolutist. Yet a 19th-century history textbook author provides the most apt description of Matthias and his reign: he was a “personal king” who ruled directly and enforced his own will with the help of a centralized army, Renaissance culture, a system of educated officials, and the talented “homo novus” nobles he appointed.

He died without a legitimate heir, and he was succeeded on the throne by Władysław II Jagiełło – who was remembered in Hungarian public consciousness as weak and inept – and his son, Louis II. A popular legend circulated about the former that he replied “dobzse” (all right) to everything, while the latter was said to have been born prematurely and, as an infant, placed inside the stomach of a freshly slaughtered pig to keep him warm.

Under King Władysław II, the largest peasant uprising in the country’s history took place: the Peasants’ War led by György Dózsa (1514), and during his son’s reign, Nándorfehérvár fell (1521). The latter could not be recaptured for five years. The first military assembly was dispersed by the plague, and subsequent ones could not even be convened due to discord among the barons and ineffective royal leadership. Hungarian contemporary historians and the Papal Legate Antonio Giovanni da Burgio (d. c. 1538), who was at the Hungarian court in 1526, provide numerous examples of the latter. At the same time, according to some historians, charters seem to nuance this negative evaluation, leading to numerous debates regarding the military and political achievements of the Jagiellonian rulers of Hungary.



Portrait of Mátyás Hunyadi (1683)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



Portrait of Władysław II (1664)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection

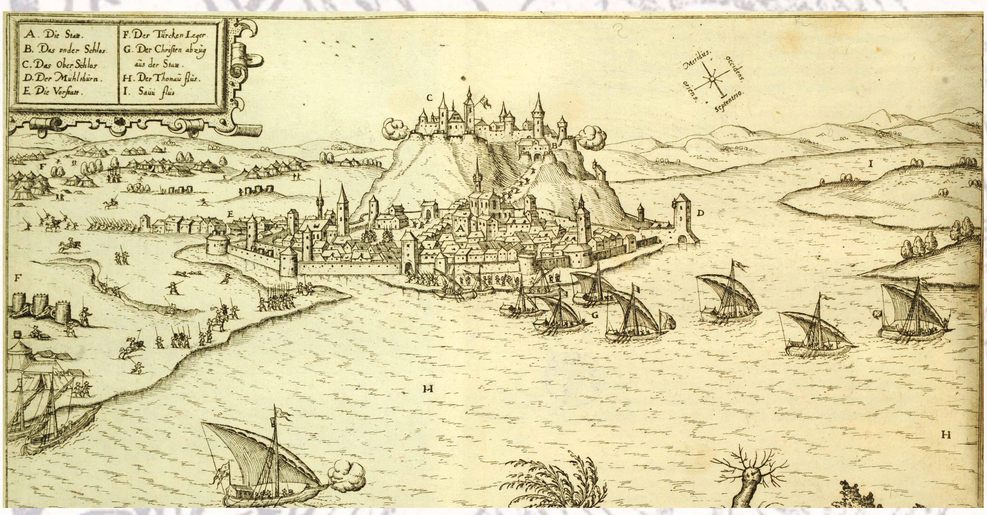


Portrait of Louis II (before 1619)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



Execution of György Dózsa (1519)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection

The Siege of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) in 1521 (1602)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



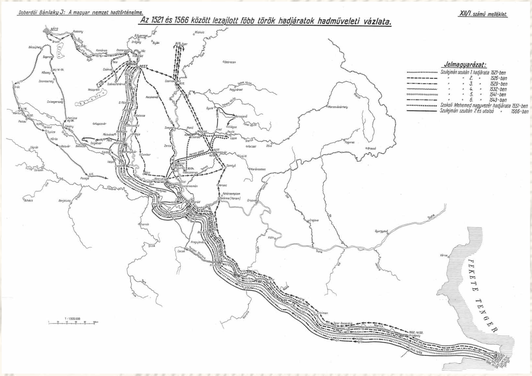
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Question marks: the Battle at Mohács

The Battle of Mohács took place in the early afternoon of 29 August 1526, on the Mohács Plain (which is not actually flat); the exact location is disputed, and the mass graves have not yet been found. The battle was fought between the armies of the Kingdom of Hungary, led by King Louis II (1516–1526), and the Ottoman Empire, led by Sultan Suleiman I (1520–1566). The commander-in-chief of the Hungarian forces was Pál Tomori (c. 1475–1526), Archbishop of Kalocsa. The battle ended in a decisive Ottoman victory. The strength of the Hungarian forces is estimated at 25,000, while that of the Ottomans is estimated at 60,000–80,000. The Hungarian side had approximately 80 cannons, while the Ottomans had about 300.

The assault of the heavy cavalry against the Ottoman center was halted; the Ottoman cannons and the musket fire of the Janissaries assigned to defend the artillery wreaked immense destruction, and then the Ottoman army routed the infantry, which consisted largely of experienced European mercenaries. A significant portion of the army fighting under the Hungarian flag was wiped out.

The battle raises numerous unanswered or disputed questions: Why did the Hungarian side agree to the battle, and why at Mohács of all places? Why did the army of János Szapolyai (1490–1540), Voivode of Transylvania and later King of Hungary, fail to arrive on the battlefield? Why was the bulk of the military potential of the Kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary not mobilized? When, where, and under what circumstances did King Louis II die? Why did Suleiman leave Buda in 1526, and why did he not capture it until 1541?



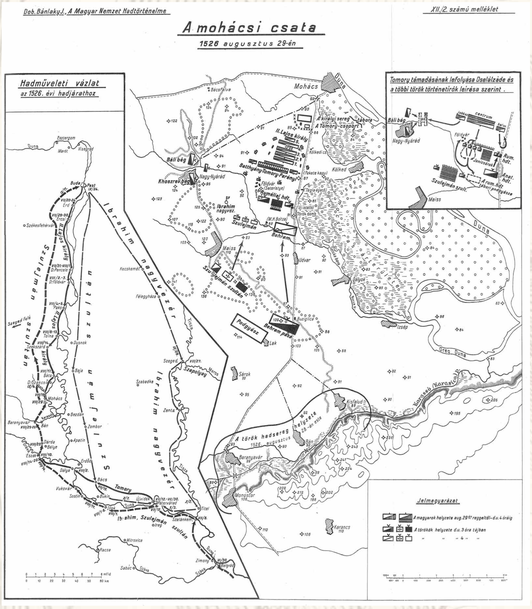
Bánlaky, József: Ottoman Campaigns Between 1521 and 1566 (1930)
Source: wikipedia



The Portrait of János Szapolyai (1664)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection

Suleiman I (1619)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection





Bánlaky, József: The Battle at Mohács (1930)
Source: wikipedia



The Battle at Mohács on an Ottoman Miniature from the 16th century (s.d.)
Source: wikipedia



Johann Schreier:The Battle at Mohács (1555)
Source: wikipedia

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Short-Term Consequences: After Mohács

István Brodarics (c. 1471–1539), bishop of Pécs and later of Vác, and Chancellor to Louis II, took part in the Battle of Mohács, having survived it, he began writing his short book Historia verissima... in Latin a few days after the defeat. This is one of the most important written accounts of the Battle of Mohács.

Approximately two-thirds of those fighting on the Hungarian side fell in battle, including seven out of ten high-ranking church officials – among them the commander-in-chief, Pál Tomori, Archbishop of Kalocsa, and László Szalkai, Archbishop of Esztergom, along with five other bishops – as well as 16 standard-bearers and 12 noblemen. Many believed that the fleeing king was killed by his own Hungarian bodyguards; Brodarics wrote his book to refute this claim. The most widely accepted account in historical consciousness is that the king drowned in the Stream Csele, but historians today dispute this as well.

After the battle ended, the Ottomans remained under arms all night, awaiting the arrival of the main Hungarian forces; Then they marched toward Buda, plundering the areas along the Danube and, finally, the capital itself. In the interior of the country, the main Ottoman forces suffered greater losses at the hands of peasant militias than they had at Mohács. The Ottomans retreated to Istanbul at the end of September, the reason for which is a matter of debate among historians.

At the end of 1526, the Hungarian estates elected two kings, János Szapolyai and Ferdinand I of Habsburg, marking the beginning of a civil war in the Kingdom of Hungary that lasted until 1541; the Ottomans intervened on Szapolyai's side on several occasions (1529, 1532). This led to the siege of Kőszeg (1532), during which Miklós Jurisics (1490–1544) defended Kőszeg Castle against Grand Vizier Ibrahim.



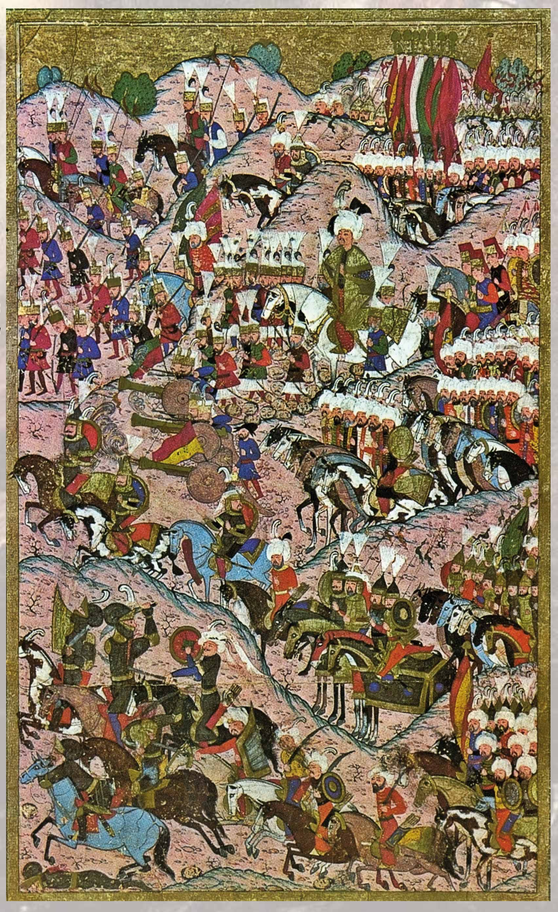
Orlai Petrich, Soma: The Discovery of the Body of King Louis II, who Fell at Mohács (1851)
Source: wikipedia



The War Council of Louis II Right Before the Battle in an Ottoman Miniature (s.d.)
Source: wikipedia



Clash of Kinghts in an Ottoman Miniature (s.d.)
Source: wikipedia



Suleiman After the Victory in an Ottoman Miniature (s.d.)
Source: wikipedia



Portrait of Miklós Jurisics (1832)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection

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Heroes: Legendary Figures of the Fights Against the Ottomans

Among the figures of the struggle against the Ottomans, a few prominent ones have become almost ingrained in the current Hungarian collective consciousness. These are primarily those who were canonized in the public education system that began to take shape in the 19th century, and specifically within the teaching of history.

The two defeats (in 1444 and 1448) and his great triumph, the victory at Nándorfehérvár (1456) of János Hunyadi are primarily covered in current Hungarian textbooks, but his approximately ten minor victories has faded from public memory. The same is true of Jován Thallóczy (d. 1445), who defended Nándorfehérvár for months in 1440 against the Ottoman Sultan Murad II (1421–1444).

Pál Kinizsi (d. 1494), a warrior of legendary strength under Mátyás Hunyadi, defeated the Ottomans at the Battle of Kenyérmező (1479) and, according to legend, danced with the two dead bodies of Ottoman soldiers grabbing their belts in his mouth to celebrate the victory. Later, Ferenc Nádasdy II (1555–1604) – a military commander, Bailiff of Vas County, Captain-General of the region west of the Danube, and the "Black Bey," the bane of the Ottomans in the 16th century – also celebrated his victory in this manner. His wife was Erzsébet Báthori, who, due to her alleged witchcraft and atrocities, was given the nickname "the Monster of Csejte" and entered the Western European collective consciousness as a vampire.

One of the most famous military commanders of Croatian descent in the 16th-century Kingdom of Hungary was Miklós Zrínyi IV (1508–1566), who defended Szigetvár against Suleiman the Magnificent and, according to a poem written about him, even killed the sultan during a sortie. The sultan did indeed die during the siege, but of natural causes. His great-grandson, Miklós Zrínyi VII (1620–1664), was also an outstanding military commander, poet, and military theorist of his time, who died in a hunting accident under unclear circumstances.

Charles of Lorraine (Charles Leopold V, Duke of Lorraine, 1643–1690), a general of the Holy League against the Ottomans, whose enduring contributions were instrumental in driving the Ottomans out (1683–1699) of the Kingdom of Hungary.

The European memento of the heroism of the Hungarian Kindom is the noon bell. On 29 June 1456, Pope Callixtus III ordered the bells of every European church to be rung every day at noon, as a call for believers to pray for the defenders of Nándorfehérvár. This practice traditionally attributed to the international commemoration of the victory.



The Flag-Adorned Residential Tower of Nagyvázsony Castle, With the Equestrian Statue of Pál Kinizsi in Front of it

Source: wikipedia



János Hunyadi (1683)

Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



Miklós (IV) Zrínyi

Source: wikipedia



Peter Krafft: Sortie of Zrínyi (1825)

Source: wikipedia



The Death of Miklós (VII) Zrínyi (after 1664)

Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



Charles of Lorraine(1687)

Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection

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Wars for Fortresses: The Everyday Heroes of the Struggle Against the Ottomans

During the period of forced coexistence between the Ottomans and the Hungarians (1541–1699), the intensity of the fighting fluctuated. Between 1541 and 1544, the Ottomans captured the castles around Buda, and then, during the castle sieges of 1551–1552 (e.g. Szolnok, Drégely, Eger) and of 1566 (e.g. Szigetvár), they established the territory of the Ottoman-ruled region centered by Buda. This was followed by the so-called "first years of peaceful war times" during which a daily grind of conflict continued under the guise of an official peace. This period was ended by another major war, the Fifteen Years' War (1591–1606), which was followed by a second period of "peaceful war times," interrupted only briefly by the War of 1663–1664, until 1683, when the expulsion of the Ottomans began. This was concluded by the Treaty of Karlóca in 1699 and then, completely and definitively, by the Treaty of Pozsarevác in 1718.

Numerous anonymous heroes also distinguished themselves in the border fortress battles. As early as 1456, during the siege of Nándorfehérvár, a border fortress warrior became famous for sacrificing his life to save the Hungarian flag and dragging down with him from the tower an Ottoman soldier who was attempting to remove the flag. In 1823, historian Gábor Döbrentei (1785–1851) identified the hero as Titusz Dugovics, but he was mistaken. Since such incidents appear in several accounts, this must have been a common occurrence among the soldiers of the border castles.

The women of Eger are also famous. They are mentioned by Sebestyén Tinódi Lantos (c. 1510–1556), the renowned chronicler of the 16th-century border fortress battles, as well as by the German chronicler Hieronymus Ortelius. They fought alongside the men against the Ottomans during the siege of 1552, avenging the deaths of their loved ones. In 1596, the Ottomans finally captured Eger Castle.

During the years of peace between wars, the country "perished in peace" as Ottoman troops moved from the occupied territories into almost the entire territory of Royal Hungary – the so-called "periphery of the occupied territories." The inhabitants of Royal Hungary had to cope with this "everyday war," but those living in the Ottoman-occupied territories also suffered during this period, just as the Principality of Transylvania found itself on the brink of destruction on several occasions, such as in 1600.



Wagner, Sándor: The Self-Sacrifice of Titusz Dugovics (1853)
Source: wikipedia



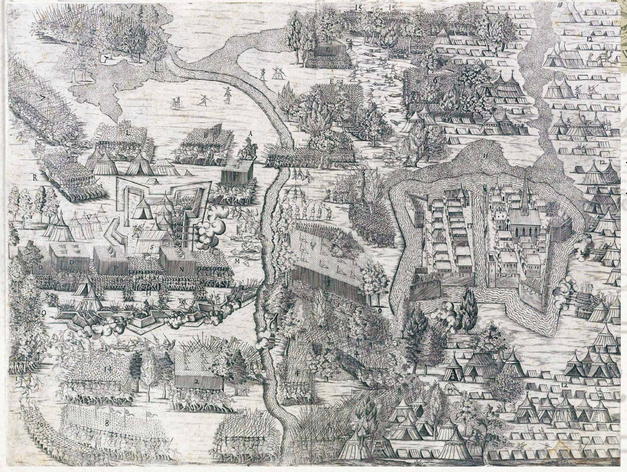
Székely, Bertalan: Women of Eger (1867)
Source: wikipedia



Siege of Szigetvár in 1566 (1602)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



Siege of Eger in 1596 (1602)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



The Camps of the Christian and Ottoman Armies Near Kanizsa in 1600 (1608)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection

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“Between Two Great Empires”: The Long-Term Consequences

János Kemény, Prince of Transylvania (1661–1662), recorded in his autobiography a conversation with Péter Pázmány (1570–1637), Archbishop of Esztergom and a pro-Habsburg politician, in which Pázmány said, *“[...] we currently enjoy sufficient authority before our gracious Christian [Habsburg] Emperor, as long as a Hungarian prince is heard to reign in Transylvania; but once that ceases, we will immediately fall into contempt, and the Germans – whether priests, friars, or anyone else – will spit under our collars.”*

After the Kingdom of Hungary split into three parts, a fragile balance of realpolitik emerged among Royal Hungaryruled by the Habsburg monarchs, the Territory under Ottoman Rule and the Principality of Transylvania, which functioned as an Ottoman vassal state (having its own autonomous domestic policy).

Opinions of contemporaries and of later generations and historians regarding the degree of autonomy enjoyed by Royal Hungary within the Habsburg Empire wereas divided. In any case, Habsburg-Hungarian cooperation was not without friction, and Transylvania’s greatest princes, István Bocskai (1557–1606), Gábor Bethlen (1580–1629), György Rákóczi I (1593–1648), and later Ferenc Rákóczi II (1676–1735) even fought against the Habsburgs in alliance with the Ottomans, with the goal of securing Protestant religious freedom and protecting the rights of Royal Hungary.

Many people – including, among others, Ferenc Szakály (1942–1999), an academic historian – view the Treaty of Trianon (1920) as a distant but tragic consequence of the Battle of Mohács. During the Ottoman period, the population of the Kingdom of Hungary stagnated due to constant wars, while in the West it doubled.This made the series of 18th-century resettlements necessary. This led to a more diverse and numerically larger ethnic composition than before, which made it possible for the country’s territories to be ceded. In the Hungarian collective consciousness, the traumas of Mohács and Trianon are symbolically linked.



Portrait of Péter Pázmány (before 1637)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



Portrait of István Bocskai (c. 1625)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



Portrait of Gábor Bethlen (1620)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection

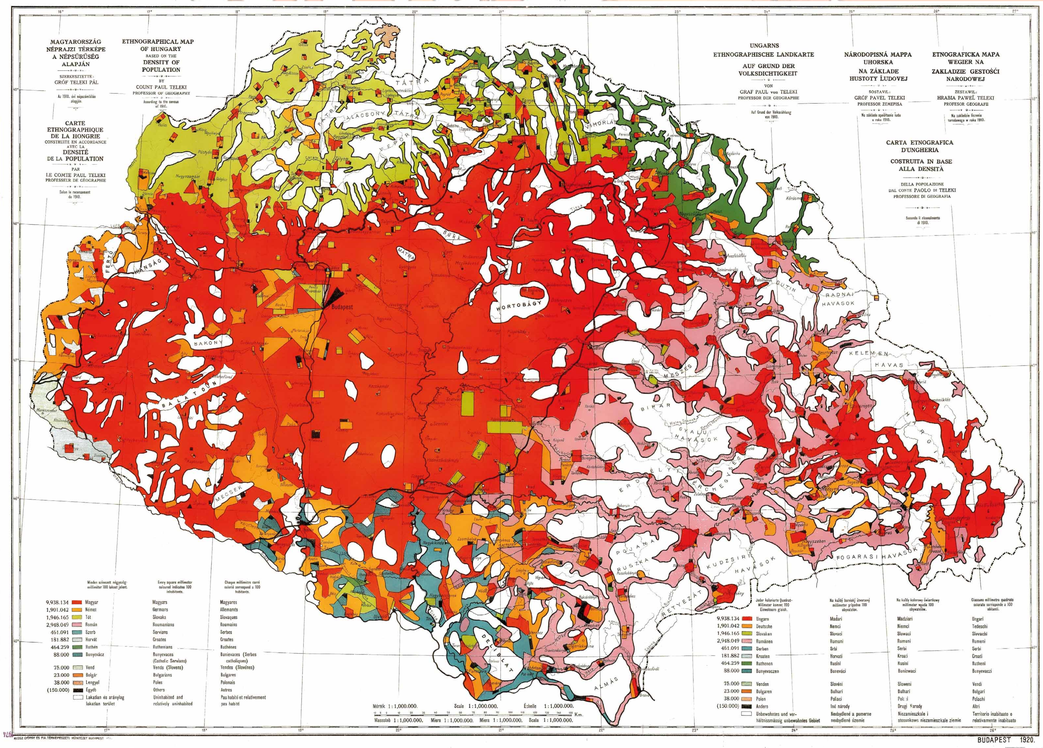


Portrait of György (I)Rákóczi (s. d.)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection



Portrait of Ferenc (II) Rákóczi (before 1732)
Source: National Széchényi Library (OSZK), Early Printed Books Collection

Pál Teleki: Red Map (1910)
Source: wikipedia



The Psychology of the Mohács Trauma: The 19th-Century Perspective

Based on written sources, there are several possible legal and legitimate accounts or narratives of the past. This is especially true of events that took place long ago, are controversial, but are considered to have symbolic significance, such as the Battle of Mohács.

In the 19th century, Mohács became a symbol of the "graveyard of national greatness" and took center stage in historiography, poetry, and historicist art. This perspective remains dominant in the Hungarian collective consciousness to this day. The cause of the defeat at Mohács was the poor governance of the Jagiellonian dynasty and the disunity among the Hungarian barons, as literary historian István Nemeskürty put it in 1966: "aristocratic banditry." At the same time, however, it was within this narrative that "the cream of the nation perished." Thus, the government's performance prior to Mohács – or even personal incompetence – did not preclude heroic feats on the battlefield. The narrative's main message was to emphasize the necessity of national unity.

The Horthy era (1920–1944) carried on this narrative, and early modern heroes were given a prominent place in its politics of memory. Regent Miklós Horthy (1868–1957) delivered, among other things, two brief but important speeches on the 400th anniversary of Mohács.

The socialist era (1945–1989) continued the 19th-century narrative of the Battle of Mohács in several respects, although it blamed the elite of the Kingdom of Hungary for different reasons: socialist indoctrination was directed against "Western imperialism" and "reactionary feudalism."

Following the regime change of 1989, a new narrative emerged that downgrades the Hunyadi dynasty's governance while elevating that of the Jagiellonian dynasty, thereby denying that the defeat at Mohács was caused by the incompetence of the elite or military errors. According to this narrative, the cause of the defeat was the military, territorial, and economic superiority of the Ottoman Empire. It was also argued that blaming contemporaries amounts to victim-shaming. At the same time, the problem with the message of this narrative is that if the catastrophe was inevitable due to the invincibility of the enemy, then the lesson for the present is one of helplessness.

Currently, both narratives coexist in the Hungarian public consciousness, even though, according to research by psychologist Sándor Bordás, the Treaty of Trianon or the socialist era represent significantly greater traumas in Hungarian culture than the Ottoman period.



Madarász, Viktor: The Lament for László Hunyadi (1859)
Source: wikipedia



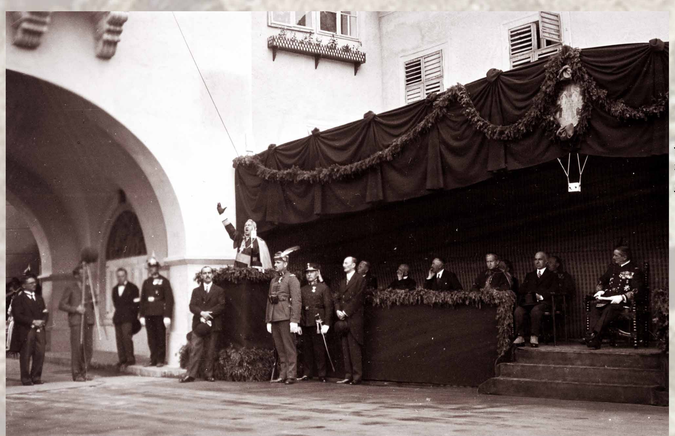
Than,Mór:The Peril of Mohács (1866)
Source: wikipedia



Székely, Bertalan: The Discovery of Louis II's Body (1860)
Source: wikipedia



Hollósy, Simon:The Sortie of Zrínyi (1896)
Source: wikipedia



Jurisics Square, a Grandstand Erected for the 400th Anniversary of the Siege of Kőszeg(1932)
Source: Fortepan / 291750

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Defending Europe for 1000 years



Source: György T. Szántó, Demokrata

The tragedy of Mohács is a drastic warning for 21st-century Europe: division, the neglect of border defense, and the surrender of our own cultural identity lead to civilizational ruin. Stopping illegal immigration and, with it, the Islamization of Europe is both our historical duty and responsibility.

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