

# MANUSCRIPTS BEHIND A MANUSCRIPT. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES OF ANTUN VRANČIĆ'S WORK ON THE FALL OF BUDA\*

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In the spring of 1548 Antun Vrančić addressed a long letter to the Italian humanist Paolo Giovio reporting on the fall of Buda back in 1541. Vrančić's letter is one of the longest and most detailed reports on the tragic events, which is odd if one considers the fact that Vrančić was not present during the siege of Buda and hence could not write from the position of an eyewitness.

In order to compose his own version, he must have been forced to consult different, (mostly) written sources. Last year I read a paper on the parallel texts of Vrančić and Giovio. In the meantime, I have investigated the Vrančić report further, and this year I focus on his possible sources. Though the fall of Buda triggered a significant response among contemporaries and numerous reports were composed, the number of possible sources of Vrančić can be narrowed, for those texts which were completed before 1548 and which could have been read by Vrančić need considering.

The rich manuscript collection Vrančić left behind makes our investigation seemingly easier. There are five texts reporting on the events in the collection. These are as follows: *Obsidio Budaë*, a kind of diary of the siege; two letters written by Piotr Porębski, a Polish courtier of Queen Isabel; chapters of a strange chronicle entitled *Epistola de perditione*

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*regni Hungarorum*, composed and dedicated to Vrančić by Georgius Sirmiensis; and two memoirs written in Hungarian.

My intention is to show in what ways and to what extent Vrančić relied on these sources, what he contributed on his own, and, more comprehensively, how he composed a masterpiece of humanist historiography based on brief and rudimentary sources.

**Key words:** Fall of Buda, 1541, Paolo Giovio, Antun Vrančić, humanist historiography

In the spring of 1548 Antun Vrančić read the 28<sup>th</sup> book of Paolo Giovio's history, where the Italian humanist described in detail the fall of Buda in 1541.<sup>1</sup> Although Vrančić considered Giovio an excellent historian and a great writer,<sup>2</sup> he made it clear that he discovered minor mistakes and lapses in Giovio's work. In his opinion, however, Giovio is not to blame for these mistakes, since, as Vrančić puts it:

Quae visa sunt aut amanuensium scribendi inscitiam aut referentium indiligentiam adiisse

[these mistakes] can be traced back to the ignorance of the scribes or the inaccuracy of the narrators<sup>3</sup>

Then he goes on in the following manner:

Nihil itaque mirandum, humanissime Jovi, sed ingenue fatendum, quod ex hominum relatu non ita recte scribitur historia, ut vel ex ipso usu aut visu bellorum vel ex annalium lectione.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Anno superiore, cum essem in Polonia, liber historiarum tuarum XXVIII. venit in manus meas...* See: Szalay László (ed.), *Verancsics Antal összes munkái [The collected works of Antun Vrančić] I.*, Pest, 1857, 178. In all printed editions of Giovio the book to which Vrančić refers is the 40<sup>th</sup>. But in the original manuscript of Giovio's work, kept now in the Morgan Library, New York (see: <https://www.themorgan.org/literary-historical/379545> Consulted: 30. 01. 2021) the book is numbered XXVIII. Since this Giovio's history was not printed before 1552, Vrančić must have read a manuscript version.

<sup>2</sup> He flatteringly points out that Giovio - because of the gravity and elegance of his style - is considered by all erudite people a Livy of their own age: *qui in humanis rebus prudentissimus est, et in omni genere judiciorum perspicatissimus. Tamen et nitore et elegantia et gravitate et copia, ipsaque sane uberrima, ut de sententiarum magnitudine et orationum praestantia nihil dicam, summis accedes et inter caeteros, tametsi Livianus haberi non ambitiose contendis, re tamen ipsa omnibus doctis is esse existimaris.* Szalay, *op. cit.*, 178.

<sup>3</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 179.

<sup>4</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 180.

There is nothing to be surprised at, erudite Jovius, but it must be honestly acknowledged that individual testimonies cannot form the basis of as true a historical work as the seeing or experiencing of wars or the reading of the annals.

Subsequently, he does draw Giovio's attention to some mistakes, but the editorial stance is a mere device, an opportunity for Vrančić to write his own version of the fall of Buda. This account is one of Vrančić's longest historical texts: in the established and commonly used Szalay edition it runs to almost 50 pages, while the freshly completed and as yet unpublished Hungarian translation (at the moment only available as manuscript) is 36 pages.

The methodological statement of the introductory letter cited above reveals that in Vrančić's view he had the advantage over Giovio, because the Italian humanist had only heard about the events from hearsay. In other words, he lacked the most valuable source of *usus aut visus bellorum*, i. e. personal experience, and *annalium lectio*, that is, knowledge of sources. Although Vrančić does not expressly say so, his readers might reasonably assume that he was in possession of all these merits, or, in other words, that he was an eyewitness writing from his own personal experience.

However, a few years later, in 1553, Bishop Vrančić had to appear before a commission in connection with the murder of Friar George (Juraj Utješenović Martinuzzi), cardinal and bishop of Várad (today Oradea, Rumania), where he submitted his testimony. During the trial a question was posed regarding the role of Friar George in the Turkish conquest of Buda, to which Vrančić replied that he did not know much about this:

Ab eo tempore, quo regina mortuo Joanne Budae obsideretur ab exercitu Maiestatis Regis Romanorum ego in Transilvania eram, **sed ex publica fama audivi...**<sup>5</sup>

When His Majesty the King<sup>6</sup> of Rome's army besieged the Queen<sup>7</sup> in Buda after the death of King John, I was in Transylvania, but **I heard it from common talk...**

And he also added:

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<sup>5</sup> Georgius Pray, *Epistulae procerum regni Hungariae II*. Posonii, 1806, 384.

<sup>6</sup> Ferdinand of Habsburg, King of Hungary and Bohemia (1526–1564), Holy Roman Emperor (1558–1564).

<sup>7</sup> Isabella Jagiellon, Queen of Hungary, widow to King John of Szapolya, mother of the heir, John Sigismund. For more on her role see: Máté Ágnes–Oborni Teréz (eds.), *Isabella Jagiellon, Queen of Hungary (1539–1559)*. *Studies*, Budapest, 2020.

Dixit se inter ceteros **audivisse** a domino Paulo Savorgano Forojuliensi, qui tunc temporis serenissimae reginae Isabellae erat ab epistolis Italicis.<sup>8</sup>

He **heard** all of this and much more, among other things, from Mr Paolo Savorgano of Cividale del Friuli, the Italian secretary of Queen Isabella.

Based on his own testimony, it can be taken for granted that Vrančić was not in Buda in 1541, so he did not see or experience the events, and in his letter to Giovio he only pretended to have been an eyewitness. Therefore, the most solid basis of for any historian's knowledge, that is, *usus aut visus bellorum*, can be excluded in the case of Vrančić. Yet, he mentions a third kind of possible source that also provides reliable data: *annalium lectio*, that is reading of written sources. Could Vrančić have access to any of these? Could he have read something on the fall of Buda?

Although the Turkish occupation of Buda in 1541 triggered a serious response from the European public, until 1548 only a handful of texts on the issue were available in print. Vrančić had read even Giovio's work in manuscript. However, this was not unusual under the circumstances of the period: manuscript culture was still in intense competition with printed literature. So, if we are looking for the sources of Vrančić's knowledge, we must focus our search on manuscripts. The number of relevant sources is limited: we are looking for texts in connection with the fall of Buda that can certainly be taken to have been written before 1548 and – most importantly – that Vrančić could have known and read. We can narrow down the search to five extant texts.

First, there are two letters of Isabella's Polish courtier, Piotr Porębski, an eyewitness of the fall of Buda. Their text is also included in the Vrančić edition by László Szalay.<sup>9</sup> The editor thought that even if the letters were not necessarily addressed exclusively<sup>10</sup> or originally to Vrančić (since they feature no addressee), they were certainly owned by Vrančić, as shown by marginal notes in his own handwriting.

The second source is a unique manuscript diary of the siege with the title *Obsidio Budaë*, which was composed at the very end of 1541. The text survived as part of the Vrančić estate, and although it is not in Antun's handwriting and probably not his own work, the dedication addressed to Petar Petrović at the beginning was written by Vrančić himself.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Pray, *op. cit.* (5), 386.

<sup>9</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 162–173; 173–178.

<sup>10</sup> In contemporary correspondence, letters on pivotal issues were frequently addressed to different persons with almost the same content.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this manuscript, see: Péter Kasza, »Obsidio Budaë. An unpublished report of the Verancius-collection on the Siege of Buda in 1541«, Diana Sorić - Linda

The third important source is György Szerémi's (Georgius Sirmiensis) comprehensive work entitled *Epistola de perditione regni Hungarorum*. Szerémi lived in Buda in 1541 and witnessed the occupation of the city. It is known that his work was written at the request of Antun Vrančić in approximately 1544–45.<sup>12</sup>

Two Hungarian texts must also be mentioned: a short memoir about the siege written by a citizen of Buda Tamás Bornemisza, and a yearbook with the title *Memoria rerum*. Both texts survived among Vrančić's manuscripts.<sup>13</sup> From our present perspective the latter is particularly important, since about a quarter of the chronicle covers the fall of Buda. Finally, Vrančić, of course, was familiar with and could make use of Giovio's text, and he frequently quoted it, but he also argued with it in several places.

The present case study is not the place for a detailed analysis of the structure of Vrančić's text.<sup>14</sup> In what follows I confine myself to the discussion of examples revealing the sources which Vrančić used and the extent to which he relied on them. I will also identify parts of Vrančić's text which can be regarded as his individual contribution, independent of the sources I identified.

On a thematic basis, the role of these five sources can be further narrowed. Since the *Obsidio* is a siege diary, and Vrančić's report barely mentions the siege, focusing more on the events that took place in the Sultan's camp and the occupation of Buda between 29 August and 5 September 1541, we do not have to consider *Obsidio* as an actual source. Bornemisza's memoir discusses another specific event, an attempt at betrayal by the citizens of Buda, but in its chronological scope it also falls far from what is important to Vrančić. And indeed, we cannot find any textual references from these two works in Vrančić's report.

Of the three remaining texts (Porębski's letters, György Szerémi's memoir and the *Memoria rerum*), obviously the first is the most important. Porębski not only lived through the siege (this is the subject of the first letter), but also took part in the

Mijić - Anita Bartulović (eds.) »*Natales grate numeras?*«, Sveučilište u Zadru, Zadar, 2020, 155–169. The edition of the *Obsidio Budae*: Csapó Fanni–Pesti Gábor (eds.), »Ismeretlen forrás Buda 1541. évi ostromáról« [An unknown source on the siege of Buda in 1541]. *Fons* 25 (2018), 225–246.

<sup>12</sup> Acsády Ignác, »Verancsics Antal és Szerémi György«, *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 4 (1894), 1–59.

<sup>13</sup> Szalay László (ed.), *Verancsics Antal Összes munkái* [The collected works of Antun Vrančić] II., Pest, 1857, 1–121 [Memoria rerum], 193–203 [Bornemisza's diary]. Both texts are available in new and revised editions: Bessenyei József (ed.), *Memoria rerum 1504–1566. Verancsics-émlékkönyv*, Budapest, 1981; Bitskey István (ed.) »Bornemisza Tamás: Emléközet«, *Magyar emlékirók 16–18. század* [Hungarian memoir-writers from 16–18 centuries]. Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1981, 70–77.

<sup>14</sup> There is no modern critical edition of Vrančić's historical work. A thorough, line-by-line analysis and the identification of his sources should be the task of such a scholarly edition.

delegation that accompanied the infant János Zsigmond to the camp of the Sultan on 29 August 1541. He wrote another long and detailed letter about this. Vrančić, as mentioned above, possessed a copy of this letter and even added marginal notes to it in his own handwriting, but besides reading it he also made thorough use of it in his own work. Let me illustrate this through a few obvious examples:

#### **Porębski**

Venerunt postea marsalci duo **baculis argenteis innixi**, qui vocaverunt dominos ad caesarem.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Verantius**

Duo postea viri clari, praetorianae custodiae praefecti, **argenteos baculos, praefecturae suae insignia manu gestantes** missi, qui et puerum et proceres ad tyrannum deducerent.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between the two texts is undeniable, although Vrančić slightly polished and stylistically refined the original.

#### **Porębski**

Decretum est inter eos, quod dominus Pettrowyth, comes Themesiensis in ulnis suis ferat puerum ad caesarem. Caeterum ubi cognoverunt eum velle lachrymari et a nutrice non posse avelli, jusserunt ut sola nutrix una cum dominibus vadat salutatum caesarem.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Verantius**

Decretum autem erat inter proceres, adhuc in consilio coram regina, ut Petrus Petrovius comes Themesiensis, Joanni olim affinitate junctus puerum in ulnis suis Solimano porrigeret. Idque tunc ex conducto diligentissime tentatum, sed puer tanta armorum frequentia et insolito rerum splendore atque spectaculo territus divelli a nutrice sine maximo fletu nulla ratione potuit. Per eam itaque, ut infanti a ploratu parceretur, duabus tantummodo primariis reginae matronis prosequentibus illatus est et in manus Solimani traditus.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 166. »Then two marshals stepped forward, leaning on their silver wand, and the lords were invited to the emperor.«

<sup>16</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 194. »Then they sent two eminent men, the commanders of the guard, with a silver wand in their hands as the badge of their command, to lead the prince and the nobility to the tyrant.«

<sup>17</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 166. »Among themselves, the lords decided that Mr. Petrović, the reeve of Temes, would take the little boy in his lap, and would take him to the emperor in his lap. But when they noticed that the little boy's mouth was curled to weeping, and that it was not possible to tear him away from his nurse, they decided that the nurse should also go with the lords to greet the emperor.«

<sup>18</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 195. »At the meeting held in the presence of the Queen, the aristocrats decided among themselves that Petar Petrović, the reeve of Temes, who was a relative of King John, should hand the boy to the Sultan in his arms. They tried to do exactly as

As seen, Vrančić closely follows Porębski's information, and only adds explanatory insertions in a few places (for example, exactly who Petar Petrović was; why the child was frightened and started to cry, etc.) The mention of queen's two first ladies-in-waiting (*duae primariae reginae matronae*) seems to be an embellishment of Vrančić, since Porębski does not refer to them at this very place. A few lines above, however, he mentions that the young king was carried to the camp in a gold-plated chariot accompanied by his nurse and two elder matrons.<sup>19</sup> That means, Vrančić is here too relying on Porębski.

In the climactic part, where the Sultan argues for his plan to occupy Buda, Vrančić again closely follows his source, and only performs minor stylistic additions.

### Porębski

Allegavit facti sui rationes aliquot, videlicet: discordiam dominorum, insufficientiam ad defensionem Budensem, imparitatem ad resistendum adversario. Ipse dixit se magno et incredibili sumptu venisse, neque posse cum gentibus sine magna suorum jactura et detrimento saepe ad has partes tuendas venire.<sup>20</sup>

### Verantius

At passae varia cum proceribus collo-  
cuti poposcere tandem Budam caesaris  
nomine, causas ejusmodi assignantes:  
habere eos nimis propinquos hostes atque  
praevalidos, et defensionem tantae urbis  
propter discordias intestinas, quas perti-  
naciter inter sese alebant, insufficientes  
esse, caesarem vero jam aetate gravem,  
neque quotannis tam longinquas, tamque  
magnas expeditiones, quales hactenus in-  
genti et prope inestimabili tum sumptu-  
um, tum hominum detrimento fecerit in  
Hungariam, posse suscipere.<sup>21</sup>

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agreed, but the child was terrified of so many armed men, the unusual glamor and spectacle, and there was no way to tear him away from his nurse without loud crying. Therefore, in order to stop his crying, the child was brought in by the nurse, only accompanied by the queen's two first ladies-in-waiting, and she gave the boy to Süleyman's hands.«

<sup>19</sup> *Misit tandem eum curru aurato cum nutrice et duabus matronibus senioribus.* Szalay, *op. cit.*, 165.

<sup>20</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 166. »He also put forward some arguments to justify his actions: the feud between the lords, their inadequacy in the defence of Buda, and their weakness in resistance to the enemy. He said that he came here at an incredibly high cost, and with his army he could not always march to defend these parts of the country without the great loss and detriment to his own.«

<sup>21</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 197–198. »The pashas said the most diverse things to the lords, and eventually demanded Buda on behalf of the Sultan, listing the following reasons: The Hungarians are too close to the enemy, who are very strong, and they are incapable of defending a city of such dimensions because of their internal conflicts, which they stubbornly instigate among each other, and the Sultan is already of age, and he cannot undertake such great campaigns to Hungary every year from such a distance as they had previously done, and which have caused him almost invaluable loss both in costs and in souls.«

This argumentation can be found in the Hungarian chronicle *Memoria rerum*. Both in Porębski's letter and in *Memoria* the sultan himself explains, whereas Vrančić puts them into the mouth of the pashas. But the line of argumentation is almost the same.

Like the other texts, György Szerémi and the *Memoria rerum*, they are not such essential sources as Porębski: Vrančić borrows no complete passages from them, but supplements Porębski's report with their data. He mentions events that are not included in Porębski but are discussed in Szerémi's work or in the Hungarian chronicle.

Let me illustrate his method with typical examples in both cases. Vrančić does not refrain from discussing a delicate matter: Mehmet bey argues that the infant who was proclaimed an heir is, in fact, not a boy, and thus cannot be an heir to the throne. The sultan grows suspicious, and when the infant is presented to him, he takes him into his lap, and secretly confirms that the child is indeed a boy.<sup>22</sup> The *Memoria rerum* contains the only written record of this peculiar episode.<sup>23</sup> If Vrančić relied on written sources, then in this case it must have been the *Memoria rerum*.

There is almost no indication of any exclusive reliance on György Szerémi. In several passages, he *could* have been the source, but the information is known from other sources as well. There is only one place where György Szerémi is almost certainly the only source for Vrančić. Vrančić claims that Werbőczy consistently argued for the trustworthiness of Süleyman, and this Hungarian noble alone was convinced that a visit to Süleyman's camp can be safely conducted.<sup>24</sup> This is strikingly similar to Szerémi, who writes that Werbőczy said the word of the sultan was as worthy of trust as the Gospel.<sup>25</sup>

A close comparison between Vrančić and his potential sources reveals, as far as the facts are concerned, that there is *no part* of his text that cannot be traced back to some manuscript source. Thus, Vrančić remains faithful to the principle he himself proposed (*annalium lectio*) and builds his account (no matter what he claimed in his later testimony) on much more than hearsay: Vrančić relies on very specific written recollections from witnesses. After a detailed analysis one has the impression that Vrančić added not a single original word, and his work, like a kind of *cento*, was built up from different pieces of information collected from others. His work, however, is much more than mere compilation, and there are at least two aspects of the account which turn the text into a real humanist

<sup>22</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 215–216.

<sup>23</sup> Bessenyei, *op. cit.* (13), 65.

<sup>24</sup> *Constantissime pro fide Solimani disseruerat, ac ferme solus persuaserat secure descendendum esse ad Solimanum.* Szalay, *op. cit.*, 186.

<sup>25</sup> *Verba sunt tanquam evangelium caesaris Thurcarum.* Wenzel Gusztáv (ed.), *Szerémi György emlékirata Magyarország romlásáról*, Pest, 1857, 365.



masterpiece. On one hand, he carefully weaves together the information from his original sources and presents it in a completely different register, using rhetorically refined language. His possible sources, if they were written in Latin at all, were stylistically either poor, like Szeremi's text, which is in some places hardly understandable, or written in a common, everyday Latin, like Porębski's letters. Vrančić acts like a real humanist: he uses the texts, exploits their information, and rewrites them into a sublime humanist Latin which could be compared to that of Gioivo, who Vrančić obviously intends to compete with.

This is a quite common method for humanists. One of the most excellent examples can be found in the work of the Italian bishop and humanist Pietro Ransano. Living at the court of King Mathias Corvinus in Buda, around 1488–1489 Ransano composed the first history of the Hungarian Kingdom in humanist style. This brief work, *Epithoma rerum Hungararum*, added no new insights into the history of Hungary. Ransano merely rewrites the chronicle of Johannes Thuróczy printed in 1488, which he considered rude and inadequate to its dignified subject.<sup>26</sup> According to Ransano the duty of a humanist was to compose texts in the appropriate style, and that is exactly what Vrančić did, too.

Though Vrančić, as far as the accuracy of information is concerned, closely follows his sources, his composition does not lack his own inventions. As mentioned before, Vrančić's most important sources are Porębski's letters. However, the Polish courtier fails his reader at a key moment. When the Hungarian noblemen are invited to a meeting by the pashas where the fate of Buda would be actually decided, Porębski writes:

[...] qualis fuerit sermo et disputatio inter eos, ignoramus.<sup>27</sup>

[...] what was the conversation and the dispute between them about we do not know

Cum his disputatum est diebus septem integris. Ignoramus argumenta disputationis [...]<sup>28</sup>

The case was disputed with those lords for seven whole days. But we do not know the arguments of the discussion [...]

<sup>26</sup> *Cumque perlecto libro animadvertissem eam seriem non tali nitore orationis explicitam, qualem rerum maiestas ac dignitas postulasset, regina ipsa hortante contuli me ad scribendum stilo paulo cultiore, quaecunque de Hungarorum principum regno atque ordine libri illius auctor non satis Latina oratione prodiderat.* Kulcsár Péter (ed.), *Pietro Ransano: Epithoma rerum Hungararum*, Budapest, 1977, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 168.

As to what happened between the pashas and the Hungarian noblemen, no written record whatsoever has survived. Neither Porębski, nor György Szerémi, nor the *Memoria rerum* provides an account of this episode. One could say that this was *the* opportunity for the humanist. Vrančić did not miss it. For he guides his reader into the tent, and he puts a long and well-structured speech into the mouths of the Hungarian lords. In this speech, the lords attempt to persuade the pashas, and thus the Sultan, to trust their loyalty, and to defend Buda; they warn that the Ottoman occupation would have disastrous consequences even for the followers of Szapolyai. The speech follows a genuine humanist design not only in its rhetorical elaboration but much more considering its role as a detailed argumentation through a fictional composition: no source confirms that it was uttered at all, and certainly not that it was uttered in this particular form. It is not true (*verum*) but could be imagined to be true, or at least probable (*verisimile*).

Besides the stylistic adjustments, this is exactly what makes Vrančić's text an example of genuine humanist historiography: the speech becomes the central element of the text, strongly putting forward the argument that the supporters of Szapolyai cannot be blamed for Buda's fall, because they did everything in their power, and enumerated all possible arguments, but were helpless in the face of the tyrannical decision of the Turk.

In addition to the speech, there is one detail in the account which is worthy of a humanist's pen. That is the story of the death of Chancellor István Werbőczy. The death is mentioned in several sources. The *Memoria rerum* even risks the hypothesis that he was poisoned. But these are just pieces of a possible puzzle, and it is Vrančić who develops them into a story, a parable, an almost Boccaccio-like novella.<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, we can say: Vrančić was not present at the fall of Buda. And yet, he was to compose one of the most extensive and most detailed accounts of the event. This would have been impossible without the manuscript sources that Vrančić collected and utilised. However, only his pen could turn the story into a humanist masterpiece of exceptional literary qualities.

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<sup>29</sup> Szalay, *op. cit.*, 187–193.