AT THE CROSSROADS OF TWO COURTS: ANTUN VRANČIĆ AND HIS FRAGMENT ON THE EVENTS OF 1551[1]

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Although it is well known that Antun Vrančić planned to write a contemporary history of the Kingdom of Hungary, essentially a continuation of Bonfini's work, only more or less coherent fragments of this great undertaking were completed or have survived. Most of his manuscripts are now preserved in the Széchényi National Library in Budapest, and the historical texts appeared in print in the first volume of László Szalay's monumental Vrančić edition in the mid-19th century.

Apart from their incompleteness, another characteristic feature of Vrančić's historical works, or rather fragments of them, is that they do not seem to have become part of the historical literature that flourished during the 16th century, even during the author's lifetime: while there are lively links to and influences on many other contemporary authors and their works, the texts of the Vrančić collection seem to have been left out of this circulation. It seems that neither the works of Vrančić nor those of the authors he collected (e.g. Sirmiensis/Szerémi) were read, used or known.

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[1] The completion of this study was supported by the FWF Lise Meitner Fellowship and by the NKFIH project no. FK-137616, *The Chronicle of the Fall of Hungary*. This paper is the English, and in some places revisited, version of my study written in Hungarian and published in a conference proceeding: Péter Kasza, »Két udvar közt félúton. Verancsics Antal 1551. évi eseményeket elbeszélő töredékéről«, in: *Sodalitates quondam et nunc – Tudós társaságok egykor és ma* (Convivia Neolatina Hungarica 6), ed. Enikő Békés, Péter Kasza and Dávid Molnár, Lazi Könyvkiadó Kft, Szeged, 2025, 183–195.

This paper attempts to use a little-known fragment of Vrančić's account of the events of the year 1551 to show that the famous Viennese humanist and Habsburg court historian Wolfgang Lazius knew and used this text, and that its creation is explicitly linked to Vrančić's change of sides two years earlier.

Keywords: Antun Vrančić, Wolfgang Lazius, historiography, history of the Hungarian Kingdom in the 16th century

Antun Vrančić (1504–1573) was one of the most prominent Hungarian—and indeed Central European—humanists of the sixteenth century. Born in Šibenik, Vrančić, with the support of his uncle, János Statileo (Ivan Statilić), pursued his studies in Italy, from where he was called home after the defeat at Mohács. Since Statileo was an unwavering supporter of János Szapolyai, his nephew likewise entered service at the royal court in Buda, where his linguistic skills and exceptional humanist education enabled his career to take off sharply, though he did not achieve a true breakthrough. Despite participating in several diplomatic missions to Italy and Poland and acquiring the prebends of Óbuda and later of Transylvania, he never managed to attain either a position among the high clergy or a leading administrative or governmental office.

This situation changed rapidly and decisively following Vrančić's political realignment in 1549. His career in the service of the Habsburgs advanced meteorically: by 1553 he was bishop of Pécs, by 1557 bishop of Eger, and in 1569, after the death of Nicolaus Olahus, he received the archiepiscopal see of Esztergom, which conferred upon him the primacy of Hungary and the office of lord chancellor. As a sign of Emperor Maximilian II's complete confidence, he was also appointed governor (*locumtenens*) in 1572. The monarch even tried to secure a cardinal's hat for him,[2] yet Vrančić could not enjoy this distinctions for long, as he died soon after, in 1573 in Eperjes (Prešov), ten days after his appointment.[3]

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[2] The question of whether Vrančić was made a cardinal is still debated. Even though he was seriously considered for the honour and backed by the rulers, he is not mentioned in the official list of named cardinals. Jadranka Neralić, »Kronologija uspona Antuna Vrančića na crkvenoj hijerarhijskoj ljestvici: vatikanski izvori«, in *Zbornik o Antunu Vrančiću*, ed. Vilijam Lakić, Gradska knjižnica »Juraj Šižgorić«, Šibenik, 2005, 106–107.

[3] A truly authoritative, modern biography of Vrančić has yet to be written, at least in Hungarian. For biographical data, the Hungarian scholarly community still relies primarily on the short monograph written at the end of the nineteenth century by Pongrácz Sörös, *Verancsics Antal élete*, Buzárovits Nyomda, Esztergom, 1898. The Croatian literature is more advanced: for instance, Darko Novaković and Vladimir Vratović, *S visina sve. Antun Vrančić*, Globus, Zagreb, 1979, gives a comprehensive look into Vrančić's life based on his correspondence. There is also a substantial introductory study (in terms of biographical data) in: *Carigradska pisma Antuna Vrančića. Hrvatski i engleski prijevod odabranih latinskih pisama / The Istanbul letters of Antun Vrančić: Croatian and English*

At the time of his death, Antun Vrančić was undoubtedly one of the most influential figures of the Kingdom of Hungary, both in ecclesiastical and in secular affairs. The emperor's trust in him is further demonstrated by the major diplomatic missions in which Vrančić played a decisive role. His appointment as bishop of Pécs in 1553 was largely honorary, since the episcopal see and most of its territory had already fallen under Ottoman rule. Nevertheless, his mission that same year to Constantinople, together with Ferenc Zay, was of great significance: they succeeded in securing a five-year truce with the Porte.[4] Even more important was his embassy to Constantinople in 1567–1568, which resulted in the Peace of Adrianople—an agreement that effectively concluded the destructive wars of the mid-century, ushered in a period of relative peace and stability, and provided crucial time for the preparation of Hungary's defences against the Turks.[5]

Although Vrančić's political and diplomatic activities, together with his role in ecclesiastical governance, would alone suffice to make him one of the key figures of the sixteenth century, his reputation owes even more to his work as a humanist, writer, and historian. Not only did he collect historical manuscripts,[6] but, in addition to his vast and still only partially explored private and diplomatic correspondence,[7] he also composed historical works. Vrančić's aims and intentions can only be partially reconstructed from the surviving historical writings and fragments. It appears that he intended to continue Antonio Bonfini's great synthesis, the *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*, by narrating the history of the Kingdom of Hungary from the death of King Matthias to its downfall, yet he never completed this ambitious work. There is no trace of any writings by him after 1551 beyond letters and diplomatic reports.

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translation of selected Latin letters, ed. Zrinka Blažević and Anđelko Vlašić, Oğuz Aydemir, Istanbul, 2018.

[4] For his diplomatic reports, see Antal Verancsics, *Összes munkái* III: *Első portai követség 1553–1554*, ed. László Szalay and Gusztáv Wenzel, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica* 2, *Scriptores* 4, Eggenberg, Pest, 1858; and Antal Verancsics, *Összes munkái* IV: *Első portai követség 1555–1557*, ed. László Szalay and Gusztáv Wenzel, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica* 2, *Scriptores* 5, Eggenberg, Pest, 1859.

[5] For the reports from his second embassy to the Ottoman Porte, see Antal Verancsics, *Összes munkái* V: *Második portai követség 1567–1568*, ed. László Szalay and Gusztáv Wenzel, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica* 2, *Scriptores* 6, Eggenberg, Pest, 1860.

[6] In addition to several shorter manuscripts, Vrančić's collection also preserved Georgius Sirmiensis' *De perditione regni Hungarorum*, as well as the *Memoria rerum*, a contemporary Hungarian chronicle also known as the *Vrančić-Annales*. Both constitute essential sources for the history of sixteenth-century Hungary.

[7] Most of Vrančić's private correspondence was published in the large nineteenth-century Szalay–Wenzel edition, but his family letters now have a modern critical edition: Antun Vrančić, *Epistulae ad familiares*, ed. Diana Sorić and Teuta Serreqi Jurić, Sveučilište u Zadru, Zadar, 2020.

The abrupt end of his historiographical activity after 1551 invites various explanations. It may be assumed that until that year Vrančić was considering multiple career strategies. He sought to secure a stable ecclesiastical income and to make himself useful as a trained diplomat, while simultaneously advancing his position through the cultivation of a humanist persona. From 1553 onward, however, as his career gained great momentum, his growing administrative and diplomatic responsibilities left him neither the time nor the need to continue writing.[8] Having already achieved prominence, he no longer required humanist authorship as a means of self-promotion. In this respect, his trajectory parallels that of Nicolaus Olahus, who before 1543 completed his two major prose works—the *Athila*, on the history of the Huns, and the *Hungaria*, an unprecedentedly detailed and admirable description of Hungary. Both works earned high praise among Olahus' humanist friends in the Low Countries;[9] yet after 1543, as he gained substantial ecclesiastical benefices and increasingly important governmental roles, he too ceased to write.

In Vrančić's case, however, there may have been another reason for his silence after 1551. His earlier writings, composed within the Szapolyai court, present and interpret events from the Szapolyai perspective—thus representing a partisan, committed historiography. To recognize this and to grasp the nature of the surviving fragments, one need only glance at the table of contents of the first volume of the collected edition begun by László Szalay.[10] The chronological scope extends from 1490 to 1551. The extant pieces begin with an unfinished introduction, followed by a fragment describing the capture of Beograd (Nándorfehérvár) in 1521, another on the defeat of Pasha Ferhad (Perhat) in 1523, and several fragments concerning episodes of the Szapolyai era (e.g., the capture of Kassa in 1536; Suleiman's Moldavian campaign of 1538), as well as its principal figures (biographical fragments on George Martinuzzi and Simon of Athina).

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[8] When, towards the end of his life, his long-time friend Tranquillus Andronicus encouraged him not to abandon his historiographical ambitions, reminding him that he had been both witness to and participant in numerous events, Vrančić declined the suggestion, referring to his official duties and ecclesiastical obligations: *Ea enim me negotia tum publica, tum privata (quod non ignoras) cum hac archiepiscopali dignitate exceperunt, quae prorsus mihi omnem scribendi facultatem ademerunt; oblitus iam et quietis et otii et bonorum authorum lectionis*. Antal Verancsics, *Összes munkái X*: *Vegyes levelek 1569–1571*, ed. Szalay László and Wenzel Gusztáv, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica* 2, *Scriptores* 25, Eggenberg, Pest, 1871, 238.

[9] Several correspondents wrote to Nicolaus Olahus enthusiastic letters praising his works. A few examples include: Nicolaus Olahus, *Epistulae Pars II 1534–1553*, ed. Emőke Rita Szilágyi, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Medii Recentisque Aevorum* 19/2, Reciti Kiadó, Budapest, 2022, 222, 226–228.

[10] Antal Verancsics, *Összes munkái I*: *Történelmi dolgozatok deák nyelven*, ed. László Szalay, *Monumenta Hungariae Historica* 2, *Scriptores* 2, Eggenberg, Pest, 1857, 371.

The writings multiply around the events surrounding the fall of Buda in 1541: Vrančić briefly records Szapolyai's final days and, in a longer letter-like treatise addressed to the renowned Italian humanist Paolo Giovio, narrates the fall of the city.[11] Several other partially completed texts treat the Ottoman campaign of 1543, which sought to secure Buda's position (the fall of Valpó / Valpovo, Esztergom, and Székesfehérvár), while the last surviving fragment, from 1551, concerns military actions primarily in Transdanubia. The subjects thus largely derive from the reign of Szapolyai or from the few years immediately following his death.[12]

Beyond their thematic focus, the phrasing of the texts is equally revealing. Examining the language of Vrančić's fragments, Éva Gyulai has shown how the concepts of the »enemy« (that is, *they*) and the »own side« (that is, *we*) change after 1549. Until that year—until Vrančić's political realignment—the term *nos/nostri* (»we/ours«) generally refers not to Christians in general, but specifically to Szapolyai and his followers. Opposed to them stand the *hostes*—the Habsburg-aligned Hungarians or armies—who are likewise Christians, but are designated as the *Germanica factio*.[13]

When the Sultan advanced into Hungary in 1543, he did so against the German faction: *Turcus cum validissima vi adventum suum in Hungariam contra Germanicam factionem vulgaverat*. The party of Ferdinand, regarded as »German«, learns of the impending Ottoman invasion through *our* people—indeed, since the campaign was directed against them, it was in their own interest. The point here is not that Szapolyai's supporters are informing the German party—that is, acting in their own interest; from our perspective, what matters is that Vrančić clearly distinguishes between »us« and »them«.

> ad haec et nostratium opera succisivis temporibus Germani, quorum potissimum intererat, quis hostilium copiarum modus, quis animus, qui motus, quaeve instituta ratio rerum gerendarum esset, quemadmodum ex indicibus habebatur, sedulo fierent certiores.

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[11] For a more detailed discussion, see Péter Kasza, »Manuscript behind a Manuscript. Manuscript Sources of Antun Vrančić's Work on the Fall of Buda«, CM XXX (2021), 205–215.

[12] In a previous study, I have already suggested that the fragments by Vrančić focus on the fall of Buda, complemented by its antecedents and consequences. Péter Kasza, »Obsidio Budae. An unpublished report of the Verancius collection on the Siege of Buda in 1541«, in *Zbornik radova Međunarodnoga znanstvenog skupa »Natales grate numeras«*, ed. Diana Sorić, Linda Mijić, and Anita Bartulović, Sveučilište u Zadru, Zadar, 2020, 155–169.

[13] For a more detailed discussion, see: Éva Gyulai, »Két udvar vonzásában: a historikus Verancsics Antal« [Between Two Courts: The Historian Antun Vrančić], in *Latin nyelvű udvari kultúra Magyarországon a 15–18. században*, ed. Enikő Békés, Péter Kasza, and Farkas Gábor Kiss, Lazi Kiadó, Szeged, 2021, 197–212.

> Moreover, in the days that followed, *the Germans*—for whom this was of the utmost importance—were, as far as could be gathered from the signs, informed in detail, thanks to the actions of our men, of the size of the enemy forces, their fighting spirit and determination, and the nature of the operational plan they had drawn up.

When, however, the Transylvanian envoys arrive in the Sultan's camp with the tribute, they too are described as *our* envoys:

> Hic nostri oratores: Joannes Zalancinus, et Joannes cognomento Fekette, primum a filio Joannis regis pro Transsylvaniae possessione tributum illi X millium aureorum nummum […] reddidere.
>
> Here our envoys, János Szalánczi and János Fekete, first handed over to [the Sultan] the tribute from the son of King John, amounting to 10,000 gold pieces for the possession of Transylvania.

This perspective, however, changes perceptibly if we turn to the single work that can be shown to have been written after 1549—the fragment concerning the events of 1551. As Éva Gyulai likewise observed in the aforementioned study, in this text King Ferdinand, his troops, and his supporters are no longer represented as the enemy, but as part of *our* side:

> Ex nostris quinque interempti, vulnerati pauci, maior in equis facta iactura, in quos Turcae ferro saevierant, sed gloria tantae victoriae ingenti lucro nostris aestimata.
>
> Five of our men were slain, a few were wounded, and greater losses were suffered in horses, against which the Turks had unleashed their cruel blades; yet the glory of such a great victory was esteemed by our people as an immense gain.[14]

King Ferdinand himself appears in explicitly positive terms in the same fragment:

> Postremo nulla denunciatione, vel saltem nutu ipso facta, pro iusta rei militaris ratione, quod violaturus esset inducias, quas Ferdinandus summa constantia et religione servabat, nolens vel minimam causam expostulandi hosti porrigere (…)
>
> Finally, the beylerbey, without any formal declaration or even the slightest sign, in accordance with the proper rules of warfare, that he intends to violate the truce, whose integrity Ferdinand preserved with the utmost constancy

[14] A. Verancsics, *op. cit.* (10), 260; and É. Gyulai, *op. cit.* (13) 210.

> and faithfulness, unwilling to offer his enemy even the smallest pretext for reproach (…)[15]

From these passages it is clearly apparent that Vrančić identifies himself with the Habsburg king, his followers, and his forces. As we have seen, such a perspective was wholly absent from his earlier works. In other words, Vrančić writes from a fundamentally different standpoint.

The early 1550s represented a period of considerable uncertainty in Vrančić's life. He had left the Transylvanian court, where he felt his prospects limited; though his departure was not abrupt, it took time for him to find his place on the opposite side, where no ready position awaited him. His hesitation is palpable in his 1550 correspondence with his old friend Tranquillus Andronicus. Their friendship, lasting over decades, had seen both closeness and tension;[16] yet a comparison between Vrančić's letters to Tranquillus from 1538 and from 1550 reveals a striking difference.

In 1538, writing from the Szapolyai court—where he held, if not a prominent, at least a stable position—Vrančić adopts a tone of admonishment, instructing his correspondent on how to conduct himself toward men of higher rank and reminding him of his debts to friends who remained at court:[17]

> Vide quam opportune, quam egregie pro reditu tuo in Hungariam labores; quas principi pro gratia nuper per Hieronymum Lasky tibi impetrata gratias habeas; quas Statilio referas, qui te quingentis ducatis a captivitate, jam morti destinatum, et sub carnifice supplicem, redemit.
>
> Consider how excellently and opportunely you labour for your return to Hungary, how grateful you are for the favour recently obtained from the prince through Hieronymus Łaski, and how much thanks you owe Statileo, who redeemed you from captivity—when you were already condemned to death and at the hands of the executioner—for five hundred ducats.

The tone is distinctly condescending, even admonitory. By contrast, the letters written in 1550 convey an entirely different atmosphere. Vrančić was temporarily residing at Sárvár, at the court of Tamás Nádasdy, who maintained particularly cordial relations with Tranquillus. In this new and uncertain situation, Vrančić, needing patrons and allies, writes to Tranquillus in a markedly deferential, even

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[15] A. Verancsics, *op. cit.* (10), 256–257; and É. Gyulai, *op. cit.* (13), 210.

[16] See also Ádám Petrovity's study in the present volume.

[17] Particularly illustrative in this regard is Vrančić's letter written in Torda on 1 July 1538, as well as another epistle from the same year, dated 1 August and written in Kolozsvár. Antal Verancsics, *Összes munkái VI*: *Vegyes levelek 1538–1549*, ed. László Szalay, Monumenta Hungariae Historica 2, Scriptores 9 Eggenberg, Pest, 1860, 16–18, 20–22.

ingratiating tone.[18] One example will suffice—though similar humanist flourishes abound in the correspondence:

> Quare etsi non eges a me, ut te doceam, quantum ab hoc celeberrimo viro, amicis nato, amaris, commendaris, complecteris, quod quidem tute diu iam et maximis et certissimis argumentis experiris atque cognoscis, tamen ut fungar partibus meis, tibi vero etiam in minimis rebus probem mea officia, scito te illi rem oppido gratam facturum, si praestiteris, ut quam creberrime mittas ad eum epistolas tuas.
>
> Although you hardly need me to tell you how dearly this most distinguished man, born for his friends, loves, commends, and cherishes you, as you yourself have long experienced and well know from the surest signs, yet, to fulfil my own duty and to show you my devotion even in the smallest matters, know that you will do him an exceedingly pleasant service if you send him your letters as often as possible.

The intention is transparent enough: since Nádasdy held Tranquillus in high esteem, Vrančić does everything to display his own closeness to the Dalmatian humanist, thereby reinforcing his position within Nádasdy's circle. The faintly patronizing confidence that radiates from his letters twelve years earlier is wholly absent here.

The correspondence with Tranquillus serves merely as an example, illustrating how sharply the different life circumstances in 1538 and 1550 can be traced even through private letters. In 1550 Vrančić appears far more uncertain and cautious; he had not yet found his place, and in this delicate, unstable period it is conceivable that historiography—an expression of his humanist learning and cultivation—is still a component of his self-representation. Uncertain of his fate, he likely sought to keep multiple avenues open. By 1553, however, his situation had stabilized: the Habsburg court had accepted him, the king appointed him bishop and entrusted him with leading the dangerous yet crucial peace negotiations with Constantinople—a task Vrančić successfully accomplished. From 1553 onward, his diplomatic career was firmly established, and his loyalty and talents were rewarded with increasingly prestigious and lucrative bishoprics. As noted above, from that time on Vrančić had, in every sense, reached safe haven.

In 1550–1551, however, the situation was rather different. All the evidence suggests that it was within this narrow span that Vrančić composed his brief work on the events of 1551, the only known historical text he wrote after his political realignment in 1549.

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[18] See, for example, Vrančić's letter dated January 10, 1550, written in Sárvár. (Antal Verancsics, *Összes munkái VII*: *Vegyes levelek 1549–1559*, ed. Szalay László, Monumenta Hungariae Historica 2, Scriptores 10 Eggenberg, Pest, 1865, 21–22.)

The sole extant manuscript of the text, bearing the title *Fragmentum rerum Hungaricarum Anni MDLI*, is preserved in the National Széchényi Library, within Cod. Lat. 425, on folios 1r–16r. Judging by the foliation, the work comprises thirty-one pages in total, though this requires some qualification: at the word *Lacessiti* on folio 7r, line six, the text breaks off, leaving the rest of the page blank, as well as fol. 7v, before resuming on fol. 8r with a repetition of the word *Lacessiti*. The entire text appears to be in Vrančić's own hand, though the first seven folios are clearly a fair copy, showing almost no corrections. The second part, spanning folios 8r–16r, is considerably less polished: folios 8r, 8v, and 10r contain long marginal additions, and numerous smaller corrections appear throughout.[19] This suggests that the latter portion represents a final stage of revision rather than a completed fair copy. The size of the leaves and the watermark (a shield divided horizontally by a double line, with a stylized star above and below) are consistent throughout. The text was first published by Szalay in the opening volume of the *Opera omnia*, and, to my knowledge, has never been translated into any modern language except Croatian.[20] It therefore seems appropriate to provide a brief summary of its contents.

At first glance, the text appears to constitute a chapter of a larger, continuous work, taking up the thread of events immediately after Friar George (George Martinuzzi) had surrendered Transylvania to Ferdinand's forces. It opens with an account of the Sultan's disbelief: he is slow to realize that János Szapolyai's former confidant and treasurer has deceived him and now intends to drive Queen Isabella and her infant son from Transylvania. As a countermeasure, the Sultan replaces the aging and less vigorous Pasha Kason with the eunuch Ali as Pasha of Buda and dispatches a new army under Ahmed, Beylerbey of Rumelia, into the Syrmia region to recover several key border fortresses that had fallen into Habsburg hands—among them Temesvár, Solymos, Becse, and Becskerek.

Thus far, the narrative proceeds logically, reflecting the fact that the wars of 1551–1552 indeed broke out as a direct consequence of Ferdinand's incursion into Transylvania, with their principal theatre in the Temes lowlands (*Temesköz*) and the Trans-Tisza region (*Tiszántúl*). Yet about one-third of the way through, the account takes an unexpected turn: Vrančić ignores the main theatre entirely

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[19] The two different levels of quality in the text could also be reflected in the division into quires. The two sections of the text could have been originally written in separate quires, each consisting of eight pages. Vrančić corrected the first one composing a fair copy, which turned out to be shorter, so it ended in the middle of the 6th line on page 7r; a fair copy of the second quire, however, was never completed, better to say carried out, which is why the draft quire was combined with the fair copy quire. I would like to thank Neven Jovanović for drawing my attention to this possibility.

[20] A. Verancsics, op. cit. (10), 252–267. For the Croatian translation, see: Antun Vrančić, *Historiografski fragmenti*, preveo Šime Demo, uvodnu studiju i bilješke priredila Castilia Manea-Grgin, Gradska knjižnica »Juraj Šižgorić«, Šibenik, 2014.

and instead begins enumerating a series of raids led by Ali and various sandžak-beys into western and northwestern Hungary—specifically the regions between the Ipoly and Garam rivers, the Garam and the Váh, and across Somogy and Zala counties. He describes four such expeditions in total, two of which he details at length: those of Veli, the bey of Esztergom, and Dervis, the bey of Pécs.

A consistent feature of these operations is that they exert no real influence on the main theatre of war. Rather, they constitute diversionary, plundering raids, and, from the Ottoman perspective, not particularly successful ones. In each case, the Ottoman commanders devastate the designated territory but on their return fall into ambushes laid by Hungarian border troops, suffering heavy losses and abandoning their booty and captives. Vrančić dwells at considerable length on the defeats of both Veli and Dervis, describing how in the former case they were ensnared by Lőrinc Zoltay, and in the latter by Mátyás Haly (Aly), the commander of Korotna.

Since the text recounts events of 1551, it could not have been written before that date. Yet as Vrančić makes no reference to later developments, the work must have been completed by late 1551 or early 1552—a period of composition brief enough for it to have easily been drafted within a few days. We must remember that the years 1551–1552 were exceptionally turbulent in the Hungarian Kingdom. The Porte, enraged by Giovanni Battista Castaldo's occupation of Transylvania, considered the first Treaty of Adrianople (1547) null and void and declared war on the Habsburgs. As early as 1551, heavy but indecisive fighting occurred around Temesvár, while the following year—though István Dobó's celebrated defence of Eger later lent a more heroic hue to the narrative—proved disastrous for the Habsburg forces: Temesvár and Szolnok fell, a number of smaller fortresses north of Buda were lost, Veszprém temporarily came under Ottoman control, and in August the imperial army suffered a severe defeat at the Battle of Palást. From a historian's standpoint, 1552 was thus the more eventful and analytically rewarding year. Yet, curiously, Vrančić confines himself to the occurrences of 1551 and, within that year, focuses on the western regions of Hungary, far from the principal fronts.

Was this merely coincidental? Perhaps he had access only to information concerning those areas. Perhaps he intended to continue the narrative with the events of 1552 but, as so often before, failed to complete the work. It is equally conceivable, however, that the *Fragmentum* was composed upon commission—serving as a kind of *entrée* to demonstrate his abilities. To move beyond speculation, one would need to establish that the text was known and used by Vrančić's contemporaries.

Here lies the difficulty. Though Vrančić's collection of historical manuscripts was among the most significant in mid-sixteenth-century Hungary, and his own historical writings—unfinished though they may be—represent the most substantial historiographical achievement prior to Ferenc Forgách (1531–1577), Gian Michele Bruto (1517–1592), and Nikolaus Istvánffy (1538–1615), the avail-

able evidence suggests that his texts did not circulate among contemporaries. Sixteenth-century histories were seldom printed,[21] yet many nevertheless circulated in manuscript form and were known among historians of the period. János Zermegh's short monograph on the reign of János Szapolyai, for example, was read in manuscript by Bruto, Istvánffy, and certainly by Péter Révay,[22] although it did not appear in print until 1662.[23] Bruto's own work was read and edited by Szamosközy, handled by Istvánffy, and, it seems, at least partially consulted by Révay.[24] In contrast, Vrančić's manuscripts appear to have fallen entirely out of circulation. Gábor Nagy has suggested that certain passages in Istvánffy may reflect Vrančić's influence,[25] though the evidence is rather indirect and does not concern the 1551 fragment. There is also some indication that Gian Michele Bruto was acquainted with Vrančić's writings, or parts thereof, though this can be established only from data several decades later.[26]

If we are to look for a possible client—or at least someone who might have appreciated a historical account of the events of 1551—we must seek an individual who, in the early 1550s, was engaged in writing about Hungarian history. Within Hungary itself, there was no such figure at the time: Nikolaus Istvánffy was only thirteen years old, Ferenc Forgách had not yet begun his historiographical work,

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[21] The only exception is precisely the aforementioned Nicolaus Istvánffy, whose book *Historiae* was published in Cologne in 1622, only a few years after the author's death, and exerted a decisive influence on the image of the sixteenth century as it took shape in later historiography.

[22] That both Bruto and Istvánffy were familiar with and made use of Zermegh's text—then available only in manuscript form—has been convincingly demonstrated by Zoltán Tomkó and Gábor Nagy in their contributions to the forthcoming new edition of Zermegh's work. (Zoltán Tomkó, »Zermegh János, Gian Michele Bruto egy magyar királyságbeli forrása« and Gábor Nagy, »Akinek hat király volt: Zermegh János 1514–1584«). I would like to thank both authors for allowing me to read their studies in manuscript form. For Révay's use of Zermegh, see Gergely Tóth's introductory study to the edition of Révay's work: Péter Révay, *A Magyar Királyság birodalmáról és Szent Koronájáról szóló hét század*, Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Budapest, 2021, 50–51.

[23] János Zermegh, *Historia rerum gestarum inter Ferdinandum et Joannem Ungariae reges*, Jacobus Lepidius, Amstelaedami, 1662.

[24] For Szamosközy's and Istvánffy's use of Bruto see: Péter Kasza and Gábor Petneházi, »Gian Michele Bruto magyar történetei: A Rerum Ungaricarum libri szöveghagyománya«, *Magyar Könyvszemle* 139 (2023), 22–66. For Révay's sources including his use of Bruto's text see: Gergely Tóth's introductory study to the edition of Révay's work: P. Révay, *op. cit.* (21), 47–50.

[25] Gábor Nagy, »Párhuzamok, metszéspontok: Adalék a Verancsics-hagyaték Istvánffy általi használatához«, *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcinensis Sec. phil.*, 11, no. 1 (2006), 47–54.

[26] É. Gyulai, *op. cit.* (13), 200.

and Bruto had not yet arrived in the region. We may, however, take into account the possibility that it was Wolfgang Lazius, the official court historian of Ferdinand I.

Lazius was one of the key figures of Viennese humanism in the mid-sixteenth century—a successful and influential humanist, several times rector of the University of Vienna, confidant and personal physician (*Leibarzt*) of Emperor Ferdinand I.[27] Yet, from our perspective, what is of greatest importance is that from the mid-1540s (the precise date is unknown) he served as official court historian. By 1548, already as *historiographus regius*, he completed his *Rerum Pannonicarum libri quattuor*,[28] a work in four books presenting the history of the struggles for Buda following the death of János Szapolyai (1540): the fall of the capital into Ottoman hands, the unsuccessful attempts to recapture it (1540–1542), and finally, the grand campaign of 1543 by the Sultan, which brought under Ottoman control Hungary's spiritual and administrative centres with the capture of Pécs, Esztergom, and Székesfehérvár, after the loss of Buda and Pest.

It seems that Lazius originally intended the *Rerum Pannonicarum libri*, which dealt solely with events in Hungary, to stand as an independent work, as he announces in its closing lines that he planned to continue with the events of the Schmalkaldic War (1546–1547).[29] However, in the early 1550s, Lazius's historiographical conception appears to have undergone a change. Perhaps this was influenced by the partially published edition (1543) of Bonfini, who, in King Matthias's court, had composed, under the title *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*, the great humanist synthesis of Hungary's history from the Hunnic tradition up to his own time.

From the 1550s onwards, Lazius began to rework both his completed and still-draft writings into a single grand, comprehensive work, which he entitled *Rerum Austriacarum Decades*—a title deliberately echoing Bonfini's. His aim was to recount the history of the Habsburg dominions, indeed, in a certain sense,

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[27] A comprehensive monograph on Lazius' life and network of relations has not yet been written. His wide-ranging scholarly and public activity, however, together with his correspondingly extensive network of connections, is effectively summarized, with ample references to both earlier and recent scholarship, in the following edited volume: Stefan Donecker, Petra Svatek and Elisabeth Klecker, *Wolfgang Lazius (1514–1565): Geschichtsschreibung, Kartographie und Altertumswissenschaft im Wien des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Singularia Vindobonensia 8, Praesens Verlag, Wien, 2021.

[28] His manuscripts are preserved in ÖNB cod. 7697 and ÖNB cod. 7937. For a detailed discussion of the manuscript tradition see Péter Kasza, »Lazius-kéziratok: Filológiai alapvetés egy kritikai kiadás elé«, *Magyar Könyvszemle* 134, no. 2 (2018), 148–169.

[29] *In quibus pro libidine non solum immutare quaeque a maioribus sancte instituta conabantur, verum etiam omnia susque deque ferentes, ad totius Germaniae imperium aspirabant, atque mansuetam Caesarum nostrorum administrationem in suae tyrannidis violentiam transferre nitebantur. Quo de bello proximis nobis libris omnis nostra ad fidem rerum oratio constituetur* (ÖNB, cod. 7688, fol. 169r.).

of all Central Europe, from the Roman conquest to his own era. This monumental enterprise, conceived in six decades, was never completed; the fifth decas was finished in its entirety, while the sixth remained partial. The fifth decas dealt exclusively with the history of Hungary, covering the thirty years between 1526 and 1556—that is, the most eventful and decisive period of the century.[30] It can be demonstrated that Lazius, whenever the occasion required, drew without hesitation upon pre-existing manuscripts and printed works. The brief tenth book[31] of the V. decas, describing the siege of Szigetvár in 1556, is based—almost to the point of plagiarism—on Johannes Sambucus's account published in 1558.[32] Yet Lazius did not rely solely on printed materials; when circumstances allowed, he also incorporated manuscript sources. His predecessor in office, the Silesian humanist Caspar Ursinus Velius, had died unexpectedly and left his work on the wars between Ferdinand and Szapolyai incomplete. Lazius arranged the manuscript into ten books, as confirmed by his autograph notes preserved on the manuscripts, and it was his intention that Velius's text should form the fourth decas of his own grand synthesis. Evidence of this plan survives in a seventeenth-century copy, preserved today in Esztergom, which presents Velius' and Lazius's texts sequentially in precisely this structure. Thus, the method of incorporating the works of contemporary authors as sources into the *Rerum Austriacarum Decades* was by no means foreign to Lazius.[33]

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[30] On Lazius's historiographical activity, see the following studies and editions of sources: Péter Kasza, »Wolfgang Lazius beszámolója az 1552–1556 közti évek magyarországi eseményeiről«, *Lymbus* 14 (2017), 89–117; Péter Kasza, »Variációk egy témára: Wolfgang Lazius latin nyelvű beszámolója az 1556. évi dél-dunántúli hadjáratról (Szöveghagyomány és források)«, *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 122, no. 4 (2018), 417–443; Péter Kasza, »Egy osztrák Bonfini. Wolfgang Lazius elfeledett magyar történeti műve«, in *Forráskutatás, forráskiadás, tudománytörténet III*, ed. Lea Haader *et al*., Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság – ELTE Magyar Nyelvtudományi és Finnugor Intézet, Budapest, 2019, 229–237; Péter Kasza, »Magyar történelem Bécsből nézve: a Habsburg udvari történetírás jelentősége a magyar historiográfiában«, in *Latin nyelvű udvari kultúra Magyarországon a 15–18. században*, ed. Enikő Békés, Péter Kasza and Farkas Gábor Kiss, Lazi Kiadó, Szeged, 2021, 131–144.

[31] The Latin, Hungarian, and English versions of the text are published in *Egy elfeledett ostrom emlékezete: Szigetvár 1556*, texts selected and annotated by Péter Kasza, introductory studies by Péter Kasza and János B. Szabó, edited by Pál Fodor, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Budapest, 2016.

[32] For a more detailed discussion, see Péter Kasza, »Variációk egy témára…« (29), 417–443; see also the Hungarian and English versions in the volume *Egy elfeledett ostrom emlékezete…* (30).

[33] Recently about this: Péter Kasza, »Írni, szerkeszteni, kiadni. Velius *De bello Pannonico* című műve a megírástól a 18. századi első kiadásig«, in *A könyv a kora újkori Kárpát-medence művelődésében. Kiadás, befogadás, használat*, ed. Ingrid Pap, MTAK – HUN-REN BTK ITI, Budapest, 2025, 37–46.

The eighth book of the fifth decas begins with the death of Niklas Graf zu Salm the Younger, hero and commander of the 1549 campaign described in the seventh book. The narrative then turns chiefly to Giovanni Battista Castaldo's campaign in Transylvania, concluding with the assassination (December 1551) of the controversial figure Friar George, thus covering events from 1550 to 1551. The principal theatre of war is clearly Transylvania and the region around Temesvár, where, during these two years, the Habsburg armies won several notable successes; yet Lazius also touches upon the far less significant Transdanubian theatre, where he likewise records successful anti-Turkish actions. In doing so, he mentions relatively minor events and figures that are otherwise known only from the contemporary account of Vrančić describing the campaigns of 1551.

Lazius highlights the valour of three captains who attacked the raiding forces of the pasha of Buda: Laurentius Zultai (Zoltay Lőrinc), Mattheus Hali (Haly Mátyás), and Johannes Paxi (Paksi János). These three commanders are not mentioned by any other contemporary source; yet the bravery of Zoltay Lőrinc and Haly Mátyás is described in detail in Vrančić's text (Johannes Paxi, however, appears only in Lazius). Here we may focus on the passage concerning Haly Mátyás. Vrančić recounts that Haly Mátyás attacked the returning Turkish troops laden with booty, routed them, killed many, and returned to Korotna Castle laden with spoils.[34]

> Matthias cognomento Aly, qui […] finium ejus regionis partem praesidio tenebat, statuit fortunam suam tentare […] ibique edita caede majore, quam pro suorum numero, fecit etiam praedam tam hominum, quam equorum […] illaesus tandem a nemine secutus Corotnam rediit.
>
> Mátyás, also known as Haly, who kept that region under his control with his troops, decided to try his luck; he then inflicted heavy casualties on the Turks—far greater than the number of his own soldiers—and, having captured numerous men and horses, returned unharmed to Korotna Castle, pursued by no one.

In Lazius we find the following passage:

> Quam ex insidiis adgressus locis palustribus Matheus Hali redeuntem cum ingenti captivorum numero praedaque onustos, […] divisit atque in fugam egit […] Ita relata praeter spem tam splendida victoria Matheus Hali, cuius virtute haec gesta erant, spoliis onustus, captivisque liberatis ac in suos lares domum dimissis, duos satrapas Turcicos in castrum suum Carothnam vinctos adduxit.[35]

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[34] A. Verancsics, *op. cit.* (10), 263–264.

[35] The text has not yet appeared in print. Details of the Lazius manuscript: ÖNB, Handschriftensammlung, cod. 7688, fol. 184v.

> Preparing an ambush in the marshes, Haly Mátyás attacked the Turks as they returned laden with booty and slaves, […] he scattered and routed them […] And so, after his unexpectedly brilliant victory, Haly Mátyás, whose valour made all this possible, released the captives and, loaded with spoils, returned home to his castle at Korotna bringing with him in chains two eminent Turkish prisoners.

Vrančić's account is much more detailed, but regarding Haly's bravery, the essence is the same.

Vrančić's and Lazius's narratives also both report how the Hungarians of Babócsa routed a Turkish detachment including a vivid description of how the returning Turks became mired in the mud.[36]

> Nam cum iniquo et inexplorato loco Rignam trajicere cogebantur […] multi desilientes ex equis natatu flumen transmittendo evaserunt, qui potuere. Magna tamen eorum pars desiderati et capti, equi, qui partim in palude, partim in amne relicti sunt coeno obsiti et luctatione paludis fatigati.
>
> Because, while they were forced to cross the Rigna River at an unsuitable and unexplored spot […] many jumped off their horses and tried to swim across the river, and those who were able did escape in this way, but the majority perished or were taken captive after leaving behind their horses covered in mud and exhausted from struggling through the swamp, some in the swamp and some in the river.

Lazius writes:

> tamen ita feliciter a tergo et loco opportuno conserta manu divisit atque in fugam egit, ut coeno haerentes ac palustribus praepediti nulla se expedire ratione potuerint atque in ordinem componere.[37]
>
> but he attacked from the rear and from a favourable position and having engaged them, he scattered and routed them so successfully that the enemy became stuck in the mud and, impeded by the marshes, could in no way extricate themselves or form up into battle order.

It cannot, of course, be ruled out that Lazius had access to other sources concerning the participants and events of the Transdanubian campaigns. Thus the question arises: can it be demonstrated that any connection existed between Lazius and Vrančić, that the Austrian humanist might have known Vrančić personally and perhaps obtained data—or even texts—from him, which he then incorporated into his own work?

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[36] A. Verancsics, *op. cit.* (10), 263.

[37] ÖNB, Handschriftensammlung, cod. 7688, fol. 184v.

The most straightforward evidence would be correspondence between the two. Unfortunately, Lazius' letters have not survived, and in Vrančić's extant correspondence there is no mention of his Viennese colleague. Yet, there is another piece of evidence that incontrovertibly proves that the two humanists did, in fact, know each other—and indeed may have been in close contact in the early 1550s.

This proof derives from Lazius' cartographic activity. It was the Viennese humanist who published the second map of Hungary, following the map printed at Ingolstadt in 1528 by Lazarus Secretarius (Lázár deák). Although Lazius' detailed and data-rich map appeared only in 1556, historians of cartography have demonstrated that the manuscript on which it was based was already complete by 1552, but the printing was delayed for several years.[38] In the lower right corner of this large printed map there is a cartouche (**Figure**)—an ornamental information panel—listing those who had assisted Lazius with data for its preparation. On this list, in a most distinguished position, second only to the unnamed Bishop of Veszprém (that is, Pál Bornemisza / Paulus Abstemius), appears the name of Antun Vrančić. The text in the cartouche must have been prepared before 1553–1554, that is, prior to Vrančić's episcopal appointment, for Vrančić is styled there as *prepositus in Bernaw* (that is provost of Porno / Bernau).[39]

According to the evidence of the map, by 1552 the two humanists may have been in such contact that Vrančić was able to supply Lazius with data for the

[38] The cartographic works of Lazius have an extensive scholarly literature. Some of the most important contributions include: Zsolt Győző Török, »Two maps of Hungary: A critical study of Wolfgang Lazius' chorographic maps (1556–1557)«, in *Wolfgang Lazius (1514–1565). Geschichtsschreibung, Kartographie und Altertumswissenschaft im Wien des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Singularia Vindobonensia 8, ed. Stefan Donecker, Petra Svatek and Elisabeth Klecker, Praesens Verlag, Wien, 2021, 107–138; Petra Svatek, »Die Geschichtskarten des Wolfgang Lazius: Die Anfänge der thematischen Kartographie in Österreich«, *Cartographica Helvetica* 37 (2008), 35–43; Petra Svatek, »Wolfgang Lazius und seine kartographischen Werke: Kartenanfertigung – künstlerische Kartenelemente – wissenschaftlicher Stellenwert der Karten im internationalen Vergleich«, in *Mensch – Wissenschaft – Magie. Mitteilungen Österreichische Gesellschaft für Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 25 (2008), 1–39; Petra Svatek, »Rei contra Turcas gestae anno MDLVI brevis descriptio. Eine Geschichtskarte des Wolfgang Lazius aus dem Jahre 1557«, in *Festschrift für Univ.-Prof. Dr.-Ing. Kurt Brunner anlässlich des Ausscheidens aus dem aktiven Dienst*, ed. Dieter Beineke *et al.*, Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Geodäsie der Universität der Bundeswehr München 87 (2012), 237–248.

[39] The Cistercian abbey of Pornó in Western Hungary, which Vrančić had acquired already in 1531, appears to have remained his only stable benefice after his change of allegiance in 1549, since it did not lie within the Szapolyai-ruled territories.



Figure: Wolfgang Lazius, »Karte des Königreichs Ungarn 1556. 'Regni Hungariae Descriptio Vera'«, in *Wolfgang Lazius – Karten der Österreichischen Lande und des Königreichs Ungarn aus den Jahren 1545–1563*, ed. Eugen Oberhummer and Franz von Wieser, Wagner, Innsbruck, 1906, plates 14–17. Available at: *Hungaricana Térképtár* (Internet, December 12, 2024).

preparation of his map, and the Viennese historian valued this assistance so highly that he listed Vrančić in the second position among his patrons and contributors.[40]

During this transitional period, Vrančić found refuge on the Sárvár estate of the great magnate Tamás Nádasdy, who had excellent connections in Vienna. It must have been here that Vrančić composed his fragment on the events of 1551,

[40] Other sources confirm that Vrančić himself had an interest in cartography: in a letter written in 1549 to Christian Pomarius, he suggested that Pomarius should not reprint Johannes Honterus' map of Transylvania from 1532, but rather make a new and more accurate one, and publish it together with Vrančić's own chorographia of Transylvania; A. Verancsics, *op. cit.* (17), 332. See also: Péter Kasza, »Kartierte Geschichtsschreibung. Humanistische Länderbeschreibungen mit oder ohne Karten«, in *Habsburg kartieren: Schriftbildliche Entwürfe von Herrschaft im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Herbert Karner and Martina Stercken, De Gruyter, 2024, 45–47.

certain details of which, as we have seen above, reappear in Book 8 of the Decas V. of Lazius' *Rerum Austriacarum Decades*.

Of course, to repeat, it cannot be ruled out that Lazius had access to other sources concerning the protagonists and the campaigns of the Transdanubian theatre of war; he could well have collected the information piecemeal. Yet, there is no doubt that he was in contact with Vrančić, and could have read and utilized his account of the events of 1551—since, as the data borrowed from Sambucus demonstrate, such practices were not foreign to him, it does not seem overly bold to hypothesize that in this case Vrančić's text served as his source. What is certain is that the corpus of manuscripts containing Vrančić's historical writings never truly entered contemporary historiographical circulation. This was likely also true of the *Fragmentum* dealing with the year 1551. Yet, as noted above, the copy preserved today in the National Széchényi Library is not a final fair copy, so there may have existed another, perhaps an expanded version that ultimately reached Lazius' hands. The exact means by which the manuscript came into his possession, if it can be established at all, will require further research; I would refrain from speculation.

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Péter Kasza

NA RASKRŠĆU MEĐU DVOROVIMA: ANTUN VRANČIĆ I NJEGOV ULOMAK O ZBIVANJIMA 1551. GODINE

Rad razmatra što je moglo potaknuti Antuna Vrančića da bilježi manje značajna vojna zbivanja u južnom Prekodunavlju 1551. Taj ulomak svakako ima poseban položaj u povijesnim spisima koje je Vrančić ostavio. Radi se, štoviše, o jedinom tekstu koji govori o zbivanjima nakon Vrančićeva mijenjanja strane 1549. i o tekstu koji jasno iskazuje autorovu odanost Habsburzima. Vrančićevi raniji tekstovi razlikovali su ugarske podanike lojalne Ivanu Zapolji (koje Vrančić naziva »našim ljudima«) od članova njemačke stranke, lojalnih Habsburzima (koje je pisac, iako se također radilo o Ugrima, često nazivao »neprijateljima«). Rad iznosi tezu da je djelo iz 1551. Vrančić pisao po narudžbi, kao pismo kojim se predstavlja u novome položaju, pokušavajući zauzeti mjesto među humanistima habsburškog dvora. Da bismo poduprli tezu, treba naći suvremenog pisca i djelo koji su se koristili Vrančićevim informacijama. Takvih nema mnogo, jer se općenito drži da je Vrančićeva ostavština u rukopisnom obliku bila čuvana u obiteljskom arhivu u Šibeniku i tek je nekoliko pisaca njegova doba moglo poznavati Vrančićeva povijesna djela ili se njima koristiti. Jedan je takav pisac habsburški dvorski povjesničar Wolfgang Lazius koji se, u VIII. knjizi svoje velike sinteze ugarske povijesti, također bavi događajima iz 1551. i u tom kontekstu spominje bitke, imena i događaje u južnom Prekodunavlju koji su, osim iz Laziusa, poznati isključivo iz Vrančićeva djela. Lazius Vrančića navodi kao drugog u popisu izvora na karti koju je objavio 1556, ali koja je bila dovršena već 1551; to potvrđuje kontakt njih dvojice. U svojoj se velikoj povjesnici Lazius rado koristio suvremenim tiskanim i, gdje je god bilo moguće, rukopisnim izvorima. Stoga je vjerojatno da mu je i Vrančić učinio dostupnim svoj ulomak o bitkama 1551. godine.

Ključne riječi: Antun Vrančić, Wolfgang Lazius, historiografija, povijest Ugarskog Kraljevstva u XVI. stoljeću

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