




**SPECIAL FOCUS ROUNDTABLE: UNVEILING UNCHARTED REALMS: THE
OTTOMAN GRAND VIZIERATE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE AND THE
KÖPRÜLÜ DYNASTY REVISITED**

Turcophile, Religious Zealot, and Rebel: The Hungarian Noble Pál Szepessy's Encounters with Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü (1661–76)

Georg B. Michels 

University of California, Riverside
Email: michels@ucr.edu

Abstract

Pál Szepessy (1636–1685), a Calvinist noble, dedicated his life to the goal of turning Habsburg Hungary into an Ottoman vassal state. He spent much time in the Ottoman world, met with Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü (r. 1661–76) on at least four occasions, and regularly visited other Ottoman dignitaries. Szepessy outlined the traumatic effects of Habsburg military occupation and Counter-Reformation on Hungarian society. He was driven by the conviction that God had chosen the Ottomans as his avengers to liberate Hungary from the yoke of the Austrian Antichrist. Szepessy won Köprülü's support for armed uprisings and a guerilla war against the Habsburgs. He also influenced the grand vizier's decision to end the Polish-Ottoman war (1672–76) and turn the Ottoman army against the Habsburg Empire. When Köprülü died in November 1676, the blueprints for Habsburg Hungary's defection to the Ottoman Empire were already in place. They were reactivated by Kara Mustafa in 1682–83. Szepessy's initiatives (and similar efforts by other Hungarians) have been ignored by scholarship; their traces remain dispersed in the Austrian and Hungarian archives. My research draws on Szepessy's appeals to Köprülü; his correspondence with fellow Protestant nobles, family, and Transylvanian supporters; reports of Habsburg spies; dispatches of Habsburg residents at the Porte; and deliberations of the Habsburg War Council. Taken together these sources open a window on the life of an important trans-imperial subject whose life throws into question the clash of civilizations narrative that still dominates much of Habsburg and Central European historical studies.

Keywords: Hungarian-Ottoman relations; Hungarian revolts; Hungarian Counter-Reformation; early modern Ottoman Empire; Turcophilia

On 3 July 1671 the Calvinist noble Pál Szepessy pleaded with Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü to come to the rescue of Hungarian Protestants whom the Habsburgs “were forcing into the Catholic faith with violence.” Szepessy

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Middle East Studies Association of North America



insisted that Köprülü could easily take possession of Habsburg Hungary (including Croatia): both Protestants and Catholics were ready to rise in revolt and a rebel army of 18,000 men was waiting for the signal to strike. An auxiliary force of 5,000 Ottoman soldiers would be sufficient to overthrow the Habsburg imperial regime. A memorandum that Szepessy handed to Köprülü catalogued the horrors that afflicted “every man, woman, boy and girl of all ages.” Torture, murder, pillage, random arrests, and the seizure of estates by an out-of-control imperial soldatesca had made life in Habsburg Hungary unbearable. Many, including Szepessy himself, had fled into Ottoman and Transylvanian territories. Praising Köprülü for his “generous magnanimity (*nagylelkű nemességeteket*) toward the suffering” the memorandum concluded with the following appeal: “We would like to recognize the authority of more powerful and gentler overlords than the Germans. They have gotten used to raging over the living, dead, and even our souls. . . . The corpses of the murdered are screaming to You from their graves: don’t leave the German savagery without revenge and don’t leave the [victims’] descendants in squalor and misery. . . [only] because they are suspected of being ready to submit to You.”¹

Szepessy did not exaggerate the willingness of many Hungarians, Protestant as well as Catholic, to submit to the Ottoman Empire. In April 1670 a popular uprising led by Calvinist and Lutheran nobles had overthrown Habsburg power in the thirteen easternmost counties of Royal Hungary, the so-called province of Upper Hungary (*Hungaria Superior*). Szepessy had played a leading role in the uprising; he and other rebel leaders had promised ordinary people that the Ottomans stood poised to invade. They had mobilized thousands of peasants with promises that Sultan Mehmed IV (1648–1687) had made a vow on the grave of the Prophet Muhammad to replace the Habsburg emperor with a Hungarian king. Thousands of Hungarian soldiers, hearing that a mighty Ottoman army was approaching, had joined the rebels and seized major fortresses. Protestant pastors denounced the Habsburg Emperor as the Antichrist and praised the Ottoman army for its presumed invincibility. Hopes were running high that the Ottomans, who had just achieved a major military victory over the Venetians in the Mediterranean (at Candia), would now turn against the Habsburg Empire. But fulfillment of the prophetic expectation of liberation from the Habsburg yoke by the Ottomans did not materialize. A large Habsburg army re-conquered the lost provinces and established a terror regime unprecedented in Hungarian history – a development that

¹ János Bethlen, *Az Erdélyi történelem négy könyve, amely tartalmazza fejedelmeinek cselekedeteit 1629-től 1673-ig* (Four Books of Transylvanian History that Contain the Deeds of its Princes from 1629 to 1673), trans. József Jankovics and Judit Nyerges (Budapest: Balassi, 1993), 408–10, esp. 410. The memorandum, which Szepessy apparently coauthored with István Petrőczy, was handed to Köprülü during the meeting (*ibid.*, 408). Cf. Szepessy’s praise for Ottoman strongmen who treated their subjects more benignly than representatives of Habsburg power (*ibid.*, 409). On the mass flight into Ottoman territory, see, for example, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (Austrian State Archive, House, Court, and State Archive, Vienna, Austria) [hereafter HHStA], Turcica I. 142/2, Casanova (13 August 1670), fol. 55; Turcica I. 145/4, fol. 70, Copia di lettera scritta alli Bassa’ ò Beglerbeghi di Varadino et Agria (14 April 1671).

contemporary observers compared to the occupation of the Netherlands by the Spanish Habsburgs during the sixteenth century.²

Little is known about these dramatic developments. Historians have instead written about the so-called Ferenc Wesselényi Conspiracy, a failed attempt by a handful of Hungarian and Croat Catholic magnates to make a deal with the Ottomans during the late 1660s. These magnates, three of whom were later executed, had largely relied on Protestant nobles like Pál Szepešy for communications with the Ottomans. In fact, Protestant nobles had already established contacts with the Ottomans before Ahmed Köprülü inherited the grand vizierate from his father Mehmed in November 1661. They had refused to mobilize during the 1663–64 Habsburg–Ottoman War and instead rejoiced when Ahmed Köprülü called on Hungarians to join the Ottoman Empire during the height of the war in September 1663. There is little truth to the standard view that Hungarian elites turned to the Porte because the Habsburg regime failed to expel the Ottomans from Hungary after a purported victory over Köprülü's army in August 1664.³ In fact, Hungarian efforts to join the Ottoman Empire⁴ were driven by three quite different historical realities: the unprecedented

² On the 1670 revolt, see Georg B. Michels, *The Habsburg Empire under Siege: Ottoman Expansion and Hungarian Revolt in the Age of Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü (1661–1676)* (Montreal–London–Chicago: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2021), 122–37. On parallels with Dutch history, see *ibid.*, 145, 337. The standard work on the Spanish occupation of the Netherlands remains Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London–New York: Penguin, 1988), esp. 68–168.

³ This remains the standard scholarly opinion in Hungary, Austria, and Slovakia to this day based on two often-cited classics by Gyula Pauler, *Wesselényi Ferencz nádor és társainak összeesküvése* (The Conspiracy of Palatine Ferencz Wesselényi and his Associates), vols. 1–2 (Budapest: M.T. Akadémia, 1876) and László Benczédi, *Rendiség, abszolutizmus és centralizáció a XVII század végi Magyarországon (1664–1685)* (Feudal Estates, Absolutism and Centralization in Late 17th-Century Hungary [1664–1685]) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980). Cf. the recent surveys by leading scholars: Géza Pálffy, *Hungary between two Empires 1526–1711* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2021), 149–51; Thomas Winkelbauer, *Ständefreiheit und Fürstenmacht. Länder und Untertanen des Hauses Habsburg im Konfessionellen Zeitalter*, 2 vols, pts. 1–2 of *Österreichische Geschichte 1522–1699*, ed. Herwig Wolfram (Vienna: Carl Ueberreuter, 2003), 1: 151–61; István György Tóth, ed., *A Concise History of Hungary. The History of Hungary from the Early Middle Ages to the Present* (Budapest: Corvina–Osiris, 2005), 222–23; Gábor Ágoston and Teréz Oborni, *A tizenhetedik század története* (A History of the Seventeenth Century) (Budapest: Pannonica, 2000), 203–06.

⁴ The lack of research on Hungarians' "Ottoman orientation" (László Benczédi) during this period is astounding. The focus remains on the presumed horrors of Ottoman expansion, Turcophobia, and the subsequent "wars of liberation." Cf. Péter Illik, *Metszetek a török kor mindennapjaiból. Tanulmányok a 17. századi magyar hódoltsági peremvidékről* (Sketches from Everyday Life of the Turkish Period. Studies about the 17th-Century Ottoman-occupied Hungarian Borderlands) (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2013), esp. 10–40, 80–101; Harald Heppner and Zsuzsa Barbarics-Hermanik, eds., *Türkenangst und Festungsbau. Wirklichkeit und Mythos* (Frankfurt–Berlin–New York–Oxford–Vienna: Peter Lang, 2009), esp. 43–78; Vojtech Kopčan and Klára Krajčovičová, *Turecké nebezpečenstvo a Slovensko* (The Turkish Danger in Slovakia) (Bratislava: Veda, 1986), *passim*. Hungarian studies of earlier periods are more balanced, see Gábor Ágoston, "The Image of the Ottomans in Hungarian Historiography," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 61. 1–2 (March 2008): 15–26. The current political climate in Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria hardly encourages a more objective assessment of the Ottomans' role in Central European history. For astute insights into nationalist distortions of the Ottoman past, see Johannes Feichtinger and Johann Heiss, eds., *Der erinnerte Feind: Kritische Studien zur "Türkenbelagerung"* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2013).

expansion of Ottoman power in Hungary after Mehmed Köprülü's invasions of Transylvania (1658, 1660); the brutal occupation of the remaining parts of Habsburg Hungary by Vienna's imperial army; and the onset of a ruthless Counter-Reformation campaign.

Pál Szepessy's life story cannot be separated from these historical realities. It allows us to understand why so many Hungarians, nobles and commoners alike, came to see the Ottomans as saviors. The fervent Calvinist Szepessy was not exceptional: there were quite a number of Protestant nobles who dedicated their lives to the goal of making all of Hungary part of the Ottoman Empire; their dream was a Hungary that could become a tributary vassal state like Transylvania.⁵ Szepessy described himself as "a true and complete devotee of the invincible [Ottoman] emperor"⁶ to the very end of his life, in a fortress surrounded by Habsburg troops in May 1685. He spent much of his lifetime in the Ottoman world, met with Ahmed Köprülü on at least four occasions, and on numerous other occasions with Köprülü's *kahya* (major-domo),⁷ Hungarian pashas and the vizier of Buda. Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa called on him as an intermediary in December 1681 when he considered making the Lutheran magnate Imre Thököly king of Hungary; in fact, Szepessy became one of Thököly's most trusted advisors and accompanied Kara Mustafa to the gates of Vienna in summer 1683.⁸

The following analysis is an attempt to reconstruct Szepessy's engagements with the Ottomans from the very beginning to the end. This required gathering multiple sources from a wide array of archival repositories, libraries, and rare nineteenth-century document publications. Particularly valuable were the letters written by Szepessy to fellow Protestant nobles and members of his family. These are informal and personal ego-documents written in the spur of the

⁵ On the status of Transylvania vis-a-vis the Ottoman Empire, see Sandor Papp, "The System of Autonomous Muslim and Christian Communities, Churches, and States in the Ottoman Empire" and János B. Szabó, "'Splendid isolation'? The military cooperation of the Principality of Transylvania with the Ottoman Empire (1571–1688) in the mirror of the Hungarian historiography's dilemmas," in *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kunčević, vol. 53 of *The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi, Halil İnalcık, and Boğaç Ergene (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 301–39, 375–419, esp. 405–12.

⁶ Sámuel Gergely, ed., *Teleki Mihály levelezése. A Római Szent Birodalmi Gróf Széki Teleki család oklevéltára* (The Correspondence of Mihály Teleki. The Family Archive of Count Teleki de Szék of the Holy Roman Empire), vols. 1–8 commissioned by A Magyar Történelmi Társulat (Hungarian Historical Society) (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1907–26) 7, no. 18, Szepessy to Mihály Teleki (31 March 1675), p. 29 [hereafter Gergely].

⁷ In my sources *kahya* (a colloquial variant of *kethüda*) is rendered as *kihája* (Hungarian), *Kihaia* (Italian) ("Proposizione fatta...à boca al Kihia del Vezier," Turcica I. 146/2, fol. 21) and *Kihaia* (German) ("Des Vesiers Kihia oder Hofmaister," Turcica I. 145/1, fol. 171).

⁸ Benczédi, Rendiség, abszolutizmus és centralizáció, 108, 111, 127; János Varga, *Válaszúton. Thököly Imre és Magyarország 1682–1684* (At the Crossroads: Imre Thököly and Hungary 1682–1684) (Budapest: História-MTA, 2007), 123–5, 134, 210; Béla Tarczai, "A Négyesi Szepessy család története (The History of the Szepessy Family of Négyes)," *A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve* 42 (2003): 309–37, esp. 325; Kornél Kovács, "A fényesebb a láncnál a kard..." A négyesi Szepessy nemzetség fegyvereinek hajdani dicsősége (The Sword is more Radiant than the Chain..." The Past Military Glory of the Szepessy Nobility of Négyes)," *A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve* 46 (2007): 658–72, esp. 662–63 (written with a strong anti-Ottoman bias).

moment. They usually convey the passion of a man who was committed to sacrificing his life to the cause of liberating Hungary from Habsburg subjugation. I also have drawn on Szepessy's speeches during sessions of the Hungarian national diet, memoranda denouncing "the House of Austria" (*Domus Austriaca*), and the well-prepared presentations he gave during his meetings with Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü. The speeches survive in the proceedings of the national diet which include verbatim protocols of increasingly hostile confrontations between Protestant nobles and the Habsburg court. Szepessy's appeals to Köprülü were recorded in some detail by Habsburg spies who included the Porte's Hungarian translator as well as Hungarian renegades who attended the grand vizier's encounters with Szepessy. In addition, I have drawn on letters written by Szepessy's fellow nobles, Transylvanian dignitaries, and Habsburg officials; field reports (*Feldakten*) by Habsburg military officers; deliberations of the Aulic War Council (*Hofkriegsrat*); investigations conducted by the Habsburg authorities (with multiple eyewitness testimonies); instructions by the Aulic War Council and Emperor Leopold I (1658–1705) to Habsburg residents at the Porte; and the dispatches of these residents to the Vienna court.⁹ Taken together, these sources open a window on the life of an important trans-imperial subject¹⁰ whose actions and thoughts throw into question the clash of civilizations narrative that still dominates much of Habsburg and Central European historical studies.¹¹

Szepessy's Turn to the Ottomans

What then explains Szepessy's readiness to turn Hungary over to the Ottomans? His family history made it seem unlikely that he would ever look at the Ottomans as a positive force in Hungarian history. The family considered itself a victim of the Ottoman occupation of Hungary. Szepessy's ancestors had once owned estates near Buda but they had to flee when the troops of Sultan Süleiman the Magnificent seized it in 1541. Most members of the Szepessy clan settled in Borsod County just north of Ottoman-occupied Hungary. Here, however, they continued to be exposed to continuous Ottoman raids. According to family lore, Pál Szepessy's ancestors fought the Ottomans to the death; the family commemorated in particular the males who died in the defense of Eger against Ottoman troops in 1552 and 1596. However, a closer look at

⁹ The correspondence between the Vienna court and the Habsburg residents Giovanni Baptista Casanova (1665–72) and Johann Christoph von Kindsberg (1672–78) is found in the Turcica collections of the Habsburg court archives (see full citation in footnote 1). The court also dispatched Court Chamber Secretary Johann Philipp Beris (a favorite of Emperor Leopold I) and Franz von Mesgnien Meninski (the court's top Ottoman-language specialist) on extraordinary missions to Buda and Edirne (*ibid.*)

¹⁰ E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire. Trans-imperial subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3–11, 11–15, 248–51.

¹¹ For a critical discussion of the current state of research, see Michels, *Habsburg Empire under Siege*, 4–18; Georg B. Michels, "'They have Become Turks (*Seindt Türkhen Worden*)': Anti-Habsburg Resistance and Turkification in Seventeenth-Century Hungary," in *The Humanities in a World Upside-Down*, ed. Ignacio Lopez-Calvo (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2017), 12–35.

surviving archival evidence also shows that at least some members of the Szepessy clan found temporary accommodations with the Ottomans. To hold on to their estates they paid tribute to the beys of Fülek¹² in the second half of the sixteenth century. This seems to have been only a temporary expedience dictated by the requirements of survival; it is unclear if Pál Szepessy knew about these family precedents.¹³

It is important to note that the Szepessy clan prospered despite the challenges posed by the Ottoman conquest. By the time Pál Szepessy was born in 1636, his family had become one of the most powerful clans of Borsod County. He was hardly twenty years old when he was elected notary (*notarius*, *jegyző*) of the Borsod County diet. Only three years later he was given the honor to represent the county at the 1659 national diet in Pozsony (Bratislava, Pressburg).¹⁴ It is likely that Pál Szepessy was chosen because of his family's reputation of practicing religious tolerance toward local Catholics. While firmly committed to the Calvinist cause – as indicated by generous endowments to local churches and communities – the Szepessys had never forced Catholic serfs into their own faith. This exceptional stance gave Pál Szepessy credibility in negotiations with Catholic magnates, bishops, and Habsburg crown representatives who were then promoting the Counter-Reformation. At Pozsony he joined a coalition of Lutheran and Calvinist nobles who spoke out against the increasing confiscations of Protestant churches, schools, and endowments. On one occasion Szepessy and two other delegates met with the Hungarian Court Chancellor who represented the Habsburg emperor at the national diet. It does not appear that Szepessy's mission yielded any successes.¹⁵

The first evidence of Szepessy's pro-Ottomanism emerged in conjunction with the seizure of the Transylvanian fortress of Varat¹⁶ by Mehmed Köprülü's army in September 1660 – a major turning point in

¹² Fülek Fortress was seized by Hasszan Bey in March 1554 and reconquered by the Habsburgs in 1593 during the so-called "Long Turkish War" (1591–1606). Cf. Zsigmond Pál Pach and Ágnes R. Várkonyi, eds., *Magyarország története 1526–1686* (History of Hungary 1526–1686), vols. 1–2 of *Magyarország története tíz kötetben* (History of Hungary in ten volumes), ed. Zsigmond Pál Pach (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987), 1: 271–2, 655; 2: 1672.

¹³ Samu Borovszky, *Borsod vármegye története a legrégibb időktől a jelenkorig* (History of Borsod County from the Oldest Times to the Present Day) (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1909), 87–8; Tarczai, "A Négyesi Szepessy család története," 310–11, 323; Kováts, " 'A fényesebb a láncnál a kard...' " 659 (casting doubt on the family legend that six or nine Szepessy males died in the 1552 siege of Eger).

¹⁴ Borovszky, *Borsod vármegye története*, 96, 183; Tarczai, "A Négyesi Szepessy család története," 309, 320. Szepessy became deputy county high sheriff (*alispán*) possibly as early as 1659 but more likely in 1663. Cf. Tarczai, "A Négyesi Szepessy család története," 320.

¹⁵ Tarczai, "A Négyesi Szepessy család története," 311, 322; Mihály Zsilinszky, *A Magyar országgyűlések vallásügyi tárgyalásai a Reformációtól kezdve* (Negotiations over Religious Matters at the Hungarian National Diets since the Reformation), vol. 3 (1647–87) (Budapest: Victor Hornyánszky, 1893) 158–59, 162–63. In 1660 Szepessy joined a similar delegation to the Hungarian Palatine to appeal for the release of a jailed Calvinist pastor but apparently also without success. Cf. Borovszky, *Borsod vármegye története*, 387.

¹⁶ This is the Ottoman Turkish name for Hungarian Várad (Nagyvárad), German Wardein (Grosswardein), Slovak Veľký Varadín, Latin Varadinum, and Romanian Oradea.

Habsburg-Ottoman power relations. Szepessy had previously traveled to Vienna and personally pleaded with Emperor Leopold I to defend Varat; he was greatly disillusioned by the Habsburg failure to act.¹⁷ During and after the Ottoman conquest of Varat (which led to the establishment of the newest Ottoman *vilayet*) Habsburg Hungary's eastern provinces experienced an unprecedented Ottoman land grab. Szepessy's estates in Borsod County were threatened by Ottoman troops, sipahis, and agents of the pasha of Eger; it seems that Szepessy – like some of his ancestors – became an Ottoman tributary to protect himself and his assets. He likely benefitted from a proclamation by Ali Pasha of Eger who swore “on the Holy Prophet Muhammad” that he would prevent the ruin of his Christian subjects. Instead of taking up the sword against the Ottomans, Szepessy submitted to the sultan. As a “tributary noble” (*nobilis tributarius*) he undoubtedly benefited from Ottoman patronage: he acquired one estate after another and became one of Borsod County's wealthiest lords.¹⁸

But the principal impulse for Szepessy's turn to the Ottomans was provided by his outrage about the growing horrors of the Counter-Reformation and the concomitant Habsburg military buildup. This outrage, which resulted in part from Szepessy's unsuccessful appeals to Catholic powerbrokers in 1659, is palpable in his emotional presentations at the 1662 Pozsony national diet. This time he acted not only as his county's emissary but also as a spokesperson of the entire thirteen Protestant Upper Hungarian counties. Not only were Protestant churches seized and pastors expelled but even worse Habsburg soldiers were running amok.¹⁹ They “murder, torture, burn down villages and towns, pillage, rape, carry out monstrosities against honorable women as if they were animals until they die, deflower virgins, wreck church buildings, desecrate holy objects, . . . plunder schools and parish houses, . . . [and] dig up dead bodies and rob them.” How often had they appealed to His Majesty and declared their loyalty to Vienna? If this terror continued unchecked the

¹⁷ Iván Nagy, comp., *Magyarország családai címerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal* (Hungary's Families with Coat of Arms and Kinship Plates), vols. 1–13 in 8 vols. (Pest: J. Beimele and M. Ráth, 1857–68), 6 (10): 672–73; Pál Szepessy, “Peccatum irremissibile Domus Austriae (11 January 1671),” in Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Kézirattár (Széchényi National Library, Manuscript Repository, Budapest, Hungary), Quart. Hung. 411, fol. 20 (“Inaptitudo haec regnandi...in totius Christianitatis detrimenta”).

¹⁸ Borovszky, *Borsod vármegye története*, 167, 303 (August 1660 decree by Ali Pasha); Tarczai, “A Négyesi Szepessy család története,” 309–10, 331 with focus on Szepessy's accumulation of estates in 1659–62 (including in Heves and Pest counties which were largely under Ottoman control). The center of Szepessy's far-flung estates was the market town of Négyes where he shared power with an agha appointed by the pasha of Eger (*ibid.*, 311). On “tributary nobles,” see Michels, *Habsburg Empire under Siege*, 47, 76, 94, 96, 499n156.

¹⁹ The combination of army terror and religious persecution suggests conditions similar to those during the Thirty Year's War (1618–48). Clearly, the Hungarian case contradicts dominant views of a post-1648 Westphalian order of peaceful coexistence and religious toleration. One of the manuscript's reviewers reminded me of the longstanding worldwide seventeenth-century political and social crisis during “the Little Ice Age.” Cf. Wayne P. Te Brake, *Religious War and Religious Peace in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

country would soon stand empty (*kiürült*) or rise in revolt. The daily trauma was “altogether more painful and much harder to endure than what has resulted from the depredation (*ragadomány*) of our public enemy [the Turk].”²⁰ It is important that the grievances Szepessy and other Protestant nobles presented were again not addressed – a fact that generated significant anger in wide sections of Upper Hungarian society. Disgusted and disillusioned, Szepessy and the other Protestant delegates walked out of the national diet on 2 September 1662.²¹

The humiliating experience of the 1662 national diet pushed Szepessy and unknown numbers of Upper Hungarian nobles into the Ottoman camp. Talk of joining the Ottomans could already be heard at the diet and Catholic delegates accused Protestants of holding conspiratorial meetings which they likened to Ottoman divans.²² About a month after the end of the diet some of the Protestant delegates – Szepessy almost certainly among them – met with Ali Pasha, the Ottoman plenipotentiary in Transylvania. They offered the submission of the thirteen Protestant counties of Upper Hungary to the sultan. When Ali Pasha declined, citing Köprülü’s unwillingness to break the peace with the Habsburg Empire, Szepessy decided to travel to Vienna one last time and confront Emperor Leopold I. He was apparently convinced that the emperor would finally listen to the grievances voiced at the national diet. It was a quixotic undertaking born out of despair and anger; Szepessy was stopped in March 1663 by orders of the Hungarian Palatine who warned him that he would certainly be arrested, if not executed.²³ Six months later in September when the troops of Ahmed Köprülü seized Uyvar²⁴ Fortress – the gateway to Vienna – Szepessy traveled to the court of the pasha of Eger; he returned with a bundle of Turkish “letters of protection” (*amân kâğıdları*) – “letters of submission” (*Huldigungsbriefe*) in Habsburg parlance – which were promptly disseminated. Shortly afterwards news spread that the eastern Protestant counties of Upper Hungary were on the verge of joining the Ottoman Empire.²⁵

²⁰ András Fabó, ed., *Az 1662-diki országgyűlés* (The National Diet of 1662) (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1873), 242–45. Szepessy’s hyperbolic tone was quite typical among Protestant delegates; there was a terrible fear that Hungary would share the fate of Bohemia (*ibid.*, 140–41). When Szepessy met with Emperor Leopold I on 16 August 1662 he compared the suffering of Hungarians to the tortures suffered by Christ on the cross (*ibid.*, 153). The horrors inflicted by Habsburg soldiers were well known in Vienna but little was done to stop them. Cf. Michels, *Habsburg Empire under Siege*, 84–86.

²¹ Fabó, *Az 1662-diki országgyűlés*, 175; András Fabó, ed., *Vitnyédi István levelei 1652–1664* (The Letters of István Vitnyédi 1552–1664), 2 vols. (Pest: Ferdinánd Eggenberger, 1871), 1: 228–29 (23 September 1662).

²² Fabó, *Az 1662-diki országgyűlés*, 17–18, 69, 131.

²³ Fabó, *Vitnyédi István levelei*, 1: 234–36 (17 October 1662); Fabó, *Az 1662-diki országgyűlés*, 283–85. When Szepessy left for Vienna he already was seen as a dangerous troublemaker by the Habsburg court; several courtiers urged Leopold I to execute him (*ibid.*, 225) – an interesting fact in light of a later murder plot that was to prevent him from seeing Köprülü again (see below).

²⁴ This is the Ottoman Turkish name for Hungarian Érsekújvár (Újvár, German Neuhausel (Neiheisel), Slovak Nové Zámky, and Latin Novum Castellum).

²⁵ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives, Budapest, Hungary) [hereafter MNL OL], E148, Neoregistrata Acta, fasc. 518, no. 1, fol. 139 (“Literas patentes

It was during the 1663–64 Habsburg–Ottoman War that Pál Szepessy laid the foundations for his future meetings with Ahmed Köprülü. He became friends with Kaymakam Kara Ibrahim of Eger, a man whom Hungarian Protestants esteemed highly as a protector of their religion. It was through Kara Ibrahim, a fluent Hungarian speaker, that Szepessy began to spin a network of contacts in Ottoman Hungary.²⁶ The most important of his contacts were Hüseyin Agha, the commander-in-chief of Varat fortress; Ali Beg, a Hungarian renegade and powerful dignitary at the vizier's court in Buda; and various military commanders in Jenő, Szolnok, and other Ottoman fortresses.²⁷ These contacts were long lasting and not dependent on the personalities of individual pashas or viziers who were exchanged repeatedly during the next two decades. It was with these men's help that Szepessy gained the trust of Hungary's most important Ottoman powerbrokers. When he arrived in Ottoman army headquarters in the Bulgarian mountains in July 1671 to meet with Ahmed Köprülü, Szepessy had the support of all major powerbrokers in Ottoman Hungary. Küçük Mehmed Pasha of Varat, for example, wrote to Köprülü that "now was the time to attack since [the Habsburg emperor] would be better armed in the spring."²⁸

Szepessy's extended network of contacts in the Ottoman world was matched by a far-flung network of ties with noble powerbrokers inside Habsburg Hungary. When he met with Köprülü he was accompanied by István Petrőczy, the brother-in-law of the Lutheran magnate István Thököly and the uncle of the adolescent Imre Thököly. Another trusted client of István Thököly, András Radics, also accompanied him. These men represented a powerful network of Lutheran nobles who had participated in the 1670 uprising. They just sat in silence when Szepessy spoke with Köprülü but their presence lent credibility to Szepessy's appeal. Szepessy also handed Köprülü a letter of credence signed and stamped with the seals of thirteen other high-ranking nobles. The historical record only identifies the Catholic magnate Imre Balassa by name but the other

ditionales vulgo hodultató levél dictas"); MNO OL, Filmtár (Microfilm Archive), X492, Eger Chapter Archive, Protocollum Extraseriale AG, no. 261, fols. 396r–v. Also, in September news spread among Protestants that Köprülü had decided to call a new Hungarian national diet, in Fabó, *Vitnyédi István levelei*, 2: 118–20, 122 (6, 9 September 1663). On the readiness of the Upper Hungarian counties to secede (with an apparent decision at a regional diet in Eperjes), see *ibid.*, 2: 139, 145–46, 157, 166 (1 January–1 March 1664).

²⁶ On Kara Ibrahim and Szepessy, see József Jankovics, Péter Kulcsár, and Gáborné Nényei, eds., *Bethlen Miklós levelei (1657–1698)* (The letters of Miklós Bethlen [1657–1698]), 2 vols. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987) [hereafter *Bethlen Miklós levelei*], 1: 135, 145, 147, 165, 195, 198, 208, 617, esp. 135, 147.

²⁷ Cf. the testimony of a well-informed Hungarian defector on Kara Ibrahim, Köprülü, and Szepessy, in HHStA, *Hungarica*, fasc. 322, Konv. C (22 August 1670), fols. 21v–22v; MNL OL, E148, fasc. 518, no. 1, fol. 142; Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv (Austrian State Archive, War Archive, Vienna, Austria) [hereafter KA], *Alte Feldakten* [hereafter AFA] 1673, fasc. 4, nos. 5–6 (11–12 April), fols. 23, 26; Pauler, *Wesselényi Ferencz összeesküvése* 1: 91, 133; Gergely 3, nos. 427, 442, Miklós Bethlen to Teleki (4 June, 27 July 1666). On Szepessy's visits to Ottoman border fortresses, see Gergely 5, no. 258, Szepessy to Teleki (12 November 1670), esp. p. 399.

²⁸ HHStA, *Turcica* I. 143/1, fols. 103r–v, Copia della lettera de Panaiotti (24 June 1671); 112, Casanova to Aulic War Council (8 July 1671).

signatories almost certainly included the Calvinist elites with whom Szepessy was most closely connected: the Calvinist magnate István Bocskai, a descendant of the legendary Transylvanian prince (with the same name) whom the Porte had offered the Hungarian crown in 1605, and other tributary nobles such as László Kubinyi, László Fay, and Ferenc Ispán.²⁹

Szepessy was thus uniquely positioned as an intermediary between Hungarians and Ottomans. He was by no means the only one but undoubtedly one of the most important. Nobody else was able to meet with Ahmed Köprülü so frequently and nobody else spent so much time at the Porte during Ahmed Köprülü's grand vizierate. And even after Kara Mustafa had put a stop to Szepessy's sojourns at the Porte, he remained an influential advocate for military intervention. All of Szepessy's successors were personally groomed by him; he gave them his contacts and acted as their liaison to the Hungarian exile community on Ottoman territory. András Radics, for example, who had accompanied Szepessy to Köprülü in July 1671 established an important presence at the Porte under Kara Mustafa.³⁰

In early August 1671 Habsburg spies intercepted two letters that Szepessy wrote from Belgrade to his wife and godfather. The letters expressed the conviction that Köprülü had ordered Vizier Ibrahim Pasha of Buda to spearhead a military invasion of Hungary.³¹ "Today around noon I arrived here in Belgrade," Szepessy wrote to his wife Zsuzsanna Csuda:

I can only report that our affairs are evolving happily, and I believe that they will unfailingly (*megcsalhatatlanul*) continue in this way. . . I will write

²⁹ HHStA, Turcica I. 143/1, Casanova to Aulic War Council (5, 14 July 1672), fols. 107, 108v, 122; Beris to Leopold I. (24 August 1672), fol. 124. The Lutheran noble András Radics had been a secretary (apparently of the Zipser Kammer in Kassa) before joining the anti-Habsburg conspiracy, see *Bethlen Miklós levelei*, 1: 162–63, 167, 170, 603; 2: 145–46. For more information on Szepessy's closest associates, see Michels, *Habsburg Empire under Siege*, index.

³⁰ Gergely 8, nos. 4 (Mihály Bessenyei); 50, 58 (Fábián Farkas); 96 (Szepessy giving instructions to Gábor Kende, Menyhárt Keczer, and Radics); 123 (Bessenyei); 146, 151, 153, 277 (András Radics after meeting with Szepessy). For more on these and other emissaries to the Porte, see Áron Szilády and Sándor Szilágyi, eds., *Török-magyarkori állam-okmánytár* (Collection of Public Records from the Turkish-Hungarian Era), vols. 1–7 (Pest: Ferdinánd Eggenberger, 1868–72) (hereafter TMAO), 6: 218–19, 417, 457, 514, 521; Sándor Szilágyi, ed., *Monumenta Comitialis Regni Transylvaniae/Erdélyi országgyűlési emlékek* [hereafter EOE], vols. 1–21 (Budapest: M. T. Akadémia, 1875–98), 16: 48, 55, 57–59, 64, 66, 361, 381–84, 386, 389, 488. For more on Radics and his close association with Imre Thököly, see Gusztáv Heckenast, comp., *Ki kicsoda a Rákóczi-szabadságharcban? Életrajzi adattár* (Who was Who during the Rákóczi War of Liberation? A Biographical Reference Work) (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 2005), 352.

³¹ Ibrahim Pasha was one of Ahmed Köprülü's most trusted favorites who had risen through the Albanian patronage network of the Köprülü household. He had served as Agha of the Janissaries during the siege of Candia and led the charge against Kamianets Fortress in August 1672. Clearly, Köprülü had assigned a top military commander to the Buda vizierate (he arrived in March 1671 after a stint as kaymakam of Istanbul). Cf. Joseph von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches grossentheils aus bisher unbenützten Handschriften und Archiven*, vol. 6 (Pest: C. A. Hartleben, 1830), 272, 274; Turcica I. 142/3, fol. 138, Beris to Aulic War Council (16 March 1671); 143/1, fol. 84, Meninski to Aulic War Council (19 June 1671); 144/1, fols. 89r–v, Casanova to Aulic War Council (23 August 1672).

in more detail about all of these matters from Buda. . . Please believe me that God will provide for a good outcome. Encourage people and [tell] everyone to get ready.³²

The letter to his godfather (*compater*) Tamás Apaczai, a captain in a rebel army ready to join the Ottomans, expressed similar confidence:

The name of God be praised in all eternity. . . I write to you, Sir, with a pure conscience. You should encourage and animate everyone. . . They should equip themselves with good horses and guns. God will listen to us for certain as long as we live pious lives and strive to serve Him with our whole beings. Tell the estates across the Tisza [in Habsburg Hungary] that the sun is about to rise. . . Don't let people despair but hold up [their spirits] because our redemption will truly come.³³

The letters introduce us to the driving force behind Szepessy's quest for Ottoman support: his firm belief that overthrowing the Habsburg regime was a divinely inspired cause. Assembling a rebel army on Ottoman territory was proceeding "in the name of the Great God"; and he had no doubt that "Our God's mercy" was on the Hungarians' side. They were the true Christians whom God would free from tyranny like the ancient Israelites; God would guide the rebel army wherever he saw fit; he would assure that "our affairs would turn out well." In fact, the Hungarians were "holy warriors" (*szent vitézek*) and God would guide them toward great things. God's presence inspired them and "what was written in Heaven is happening on earth," that is, God's eternal plan to set Hungary free was finally realized. With God on their side what could happen to them? According to this logic it was "God's finger" (*digitus Dei*) which had shown them the way to the destruction of the Habsburg army.³⁴

³² HHStA. Hungarica, fasc. 283, Konv. C, Die Schriften den Paulum Szepesi betreffend Anno 1671, fol. 3

³³ Ibid., fols. 10r–v. Apaczai traveled to the Porte himself in October 1671 with a letter to Köprülü "signed by many rebels urgently imploring (*inständig anhalten*) the Turks for help" (Turcica I. 143/2, fol. 60v, Casanova to Aulic War Council [10 October 1671]; 58v, 62, Aulic War Council [14 November 1671]).

³⁴ Cf. Gergely 6, nos. 205–6, Szepessy to Teleki (15, 18 September 1672), esp. 301, 303; Szepessy, "Peccatum irremissibile", fol. 17 on divine retribution ("Impunita...infinita in coelum clamantia flagellumque numinis justissimi solicitantia scelera"). Szepessy was deeply shaped by Calvinist ideals of revolt and resistance against an unjust regime. He read the writings of Hungarian Puritan pastor Pál Medgyesi who had studied in England and the Netherlands, in *Adattár XVII. századi szellemi mozgalmaink történetéhez* (A Reference Work to the History of 17th Century Intellectual Movements), vol. 3 (Budapest: MTA Kiadó, 1971), 25 (purchase of Medgyesi's *Praxis Pietatis* in May 1677); Graeme Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier 1600–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 118–19, 149–50, 265–66 (on divine punishment), 284. György Mártonfalvi Tóth, one of the most radical Puritans who advocated the abolition of serfdom, dedicated a treatise to Szepessy in 1674. Cf. Mártonfalvi Tóth's *Disputatio theologica ... de evangelio* (Debrecen, 1674), in Johann Samuel Klein, *Nachrichten von den Lebensumständen und Schriften Evangelischer Prediger in allen Gemeinden des Königreichs Ungarn*, vol. 3 (Pest: Victor Hornyánszky, 1873), 369; Jenő Zoványi, comp.,

Szepessy's religious fervor and his quest to assemble a Godly army call to mind Oliver Cromwell's trust in divine guidance in warfare. But there was a significant difference: Szepessy never believed that even the most divinely inspired rebel army stood a chance against the Habsburgs. God had chosen the world's dominant Muslim power to destroy the evil of Habsburg rule. "The providence (*gondjaviselése*) of the Great Merciful God" was guiding him toward his meetings with Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü. And it was God who never made him waver once in his trust in the Ottomans. "We are waiting with good hope for the future removal of the great evil [afflicting] our sweet nation by the Merciful God . . . and the Sublime Porte."³⁵ A memorandum which he handed Köprülü on 4 January 1673 invoked "the Exalted God [and] His Blessed Messenger Muhammad" to plead for immediate Ottoman intervention "against the unbelieving Germans [who] are violent and harming us every day." And it was "the exalted God" who had guided him into Köprülü's presence "with presents and gifts of money based on our ability and the custom."³⁶

Some of Szepessy's closest associates suspected him of "becoming a Turk" (*turcisat*) or a renegade (*pribék*). There is no evidence for this. Yes, Szepessy spent much time – sometimes months on end – in Buda, Edirne, Eger, Varat, Uyvar, and other places in the Ottoman Empire. But he expressed no sympathy for Islam and on occasion even confided that he felt uneasy "wandering among the pagans."³⁷ His ties to Köprülü and other powerful Ottomans served principally the purpose of securing Ottoman military help against the Habsburgs. When he and other exiles launched an invasion of Upper Hungary in early September 1672, they were absolutely convinced that Köprülü had granted their request. The Ottoman advance into Hungary would be closely coordinated with the Ottoman invasion of Poland where the Ottoman army was then racing from victory to victory.³⁸ A Habsburg spy reported to Vienna

Magyarországi protestáns egyháztörténeti lexicon (Dictionary of Hungarian Protestant Church History) (Budapest: A Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya, 1977), 393–4; László Makkai, "The Hungarian Puritans and the English Revolution," *Acta Historica* 5. 1–2 (1958): 13–45, esp. 43–44.

³⁵ Farkas Deák, ed., *A bujdosók levéltára. A Gróf Teleki-család Maros-Vásárhelyi levéltárából* (The Archive of the Exiles. From the Maros-Vásárhely Archive of the Count Teleki Family) (Budapest: M.T. Akadémia, 1883), 120 (memorandum dated 2 December 1679 and co-signed with Kende, Ispán, Keczer, Farkas et al.); Gergely 6, no. 275, Szepessy to Teleki (28 December 1672), 414.

³⁶ Sándor Papp, "Petition by Rebel Hungarian Nobles for Complete Submission to the Ottoman Porte (1672)," in *Şerefe. Studies in Honor of Prof. Géza Dávid on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Pál Fodor, Nándor E. Kovács, and Benedek Péri (Budapest: Research Center for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2019), 437–57, here 457.

³⁷ HHStA, Hungarica, fasc. 322, Konv. D, fol. 93 ("Ne turcisat, sed ostendat se verum Christianum"); Gergely 5, no. 142, Ferenc Ispán to Teleki (16 May 1670), p. 237 ("The renegade Pál Szepesi [sic]...has written to me"); no. 383, Szepessy and Petrőczy to Teleki (18 July 1671), p. 575 ("Don't forget your servants wandering among the pagans"). Szepessy also mentioned that in the past "Hungarians had shed their blood for Christendom" in defense of the *Antemurale Christianitatis*, in Szepessy, "Peccatum irremissibile," fols. 18r–v.

³⁸ On the main events of the Polish-Ottoman War, see Brian L. Davies, *Warfare, State, and Society on the Black Sea Steppe* (London-New York: Routledge, 2007), 155–59. The dramatic successes of the Ottoman army in Podolia and Galicia (and its larger geopolitical implications for East Central

the exiles' ecstatic belief that "the Almighty and Most Victorious Emperor of the Turks . . . had accepted them; they had chosen to die rather than to abandon Him." The invasion, they believed, would be assisted by Ottoman troops from Varat, Eger, Buda, and Uyvar. Pál Szepessy was to play a pivotal role and lead rebel forces all the way into Moravia and Austria.³⁹

Again, as in the 1670 uprising Ottoman intervention did not occur in September 1672. History repeated itself. The exiles' invasion generated a stupendous popular revolt in Upper Hungary and swept away Habsburg power in a matter of days. Habsburg observers described the events as a revolution. Szepessy's enthusiasm knew no bounds: when more than 10,000 popular rebels crushed the Habsburg army under Commander-in-Chief Paris von Spankau on 14 September 1672, Szepessy saw it as sure proof of divine intervention; victory over the unbelievers was now inevitable. But the massive Ottoman troop contingents that had moved into position along the Hungarian borders did not move into action. Only a few hundred Ottoman soldiers joined the rebels – a fact which may explain why Hungarian rebels repeatedly attacked with invocations of Allah. In late October 1672 Habsburg expeditionary forces dispatched from Vienna arrived, defeated the rebels, and carried out brutal reprisals. It was a major embarrassment for Köprülü as well: the evidence of Ottoman participation was irrefutable. The corpses of Ottoman soldiers were found on the battlefield and unknown numbers of janissaries were captured by the Habsburg army.⁴⁰

Szepessy's Missions to the Porte

This renewed failure of the Porte to intervene on the part of the victorious Hungarians raises an important question. Did Szepessy only imagine that Köprülü had agreed to intervene on the Hungarians' behalf? Had he been misled by the grand vizier? Szepessy never thought so even when it became clear that Ottoman help would again not be forthcoming.⁴¹ His commitment to the

Europe) are best captured in Dmytro Doroshenko, *Het'man Petro Doroshenko. Ohliad ioho zhittia i politichnoi diial'nosti* (Hetman Petro Doroshenko. A Survey of His Live and Political Activity) (New York: Ukrain's'ka Vil'na Akademiiia Nauk v SShA, 1985), 403–32; Marek Wagner, *Wojna polsko-turecka w latach 1672–1676* (The Polish-Turkish War 1672–1676), 2 vols. (Zabrze: Wydawnictwo Inforteditions, 2009), 1: 215–306. Cf. Kahraman Şakul, "Siege Warfare in Verse and Prose: The Ottoman Conquest of Kamianets-Podilsky (Kamianice)," in *The World of the Siege. Representations of Early Modern Positional Warfare*, ed. Anke Fischer-Kattner and Jamel Ostwald (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2019), 205–40 (with a narrow focus on the siege of Kamianets Fortress).

³⁹ HHStA, Hungarica, fasc. 325, Konv. B, fols. 114–15, Confederatio rebellium (28 August 1672); Szepessy's undated memo entitled "Supremus Vezirius legatorum Hungaricorum instantiam, absolute non rejecerit" (Dávid Angyal, *Késmárki Thököly Imre 1657–1705* [Imre Thököly of Késmárk 1657–1705], 2 vols. [Budapest: Vilmos Méhner, 1888], 1: 56).

⁴⁰ Cf. Michels, *Habsburg Empire under Siege*, 251–96, esp. 285. On the role of Ottoman soldiers, see additionally Turcica I. 144/1, fols. 200r–v, *Opinio des Hofkriegsraths* (30 December 1672); KA, Exp. Prot. 1676, fol. 628v, *Aulic War Council to Kindsberg* (30 December 1672) ("Daß die Türcken denen ihrigen erlaubt haben ohne fahnen und trommelschlag mitzugehen"); Angyal, *Késmárki Thököly Imre*, 1: 57.

⁴¹ Gergely 6, no. 226, Gábor Kende to Teleki (29 September 1672), p. 335.

Ottomans remained undiminished. In the midst of military defeat, he immediately embarked on another mission to Köprülü in later December 1672. And Köprülü received him in Edirne only a few days later on 4 January 1673. He told Szepessy that “God has helped the affairs of the Most Powerful Emperor” – a clear allusion to Ottoman victory in Poland – and the obstacles that had prevented Ottoman intervention were now removed. He was only pretending to hold peace with the Germans and would strike when they least expected it. This assurance was enough for Szepessy even if Köprülü did not provide any specifics. A sympathetic eyewitness of the meeting – a Hungarian renegade or Szepessy’s Transylvanian translator – reported Szepessy’s exuberant response: “Powerful vizier, You spoke [these] words. . . from the will of the One Almighty God who directs human hearts as He pleases. I am besides myself with joy, and in my confusion do not know how to thank You. It is certain that God has directed His compassion toward Hungary and inspired the Most Powerful Emperor to take pity on us. We humbly implore the Almighty God that He will never regret the good deed that He is granting us.”⁴²

Szepessy’s timing could not have been better. The quick Ottoman victories in Poland had deepened the sense of military invincibility which had already taken hold of Köprülü, the sultan, and the Porte after the conquest of Candia in September 1669.⁴³ Despite Sultan Mehmed IV’s fantasies of subduing all of Poland and persistent lobbying by Ukrainian Cossacks (who were asking for protection against Poles and Russians) Köprülü was not inclined to resume the war. The idea of continuing the war was also extremely unpopular among Ottoman soldiers who had suffered great losses due to inclement winter weather.⁴⁴ Küçük Mehmed Pasha of Varat, who repeatedly pushed Köprülü for military intervention in Hungary, again stood firmly behind Szepessy. He had given refuge to more than 10,000 rebel soldiers and their families in the Varat vilayet and promoted joint Hungarian-Ottoman raids into Upper Hungary. He also fed Köprülü fabricated information that the new Habsburg armies in eastern Hungary were ready to go to war against the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁵ And Vizier

⁴² Bethlen, *Az Erdélyi történelem*, 522–25, esp. 523.

⁴³ Gergely 6, no. 275, Szepessy to Teleki (28 December 1672); Janusz Woliński, ed., “Wojna polsko-turecka 1672–1676 w świetle relacji rezydentów austriackich w Turcji (The Polish-Turkish War of 1672–1676 in Light of the Reports of the Austrian Residents in Turkey),” vol. 7, pt. 2 of *Studia i materiały do historii wojskowości* (Warsaw: Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, 1961), 322–89, esp. 327 (“Non posso scriver la superbia, che hanno li Turchi”), 328 (“Wie gross das Frohlocken und der Hochmut bei den Türken gewachsen, ... [daß] nach Eroberung Candia und Kamienic keine Stadt oder Festung in Europa genugsamblich mächtig und sicher seie, welche sich ihrer Praepotenz widersetzen oder von derselben nicht bezwungen werden kann”).

⁴⁴ Woliński, “Wojna polsko-turecka,” 330–31, 335 (“Asiatische Völker, von denen ein guetter Teil gemeüdert,” “malcontente Türken”); Kirill Kochegarov, *Ukraina i Rossia vo vtoroi polovine XVII veka: politika, diplomatiia, kul'tura. Ocherki* (Ukraine and Russia in the Second Half of the 17th Century: Politics, Diplomacy, Culture. Sketches) (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2019), 27; HHStA, Turcica I. 145/1, fol. 2v (“Von dem Doroshenko ... ein courier nach dem andern..., die Porte umb eheste kräftige Assistenz bitten thuet”); I. 144/3, fol. 8v (“Die Türkische Miliz verhoffte einen Krieg wider die Teutschen”).

⁴⁵ Cf. HHStA, Turcica I. 145/2, fol. 6 (“Der Bassa auss Wardein unaussetzlich berichtet, daß die sambentlichen Ungarische Staende den Teutschen wegen der religion undt neuen Tribut ganz

Hüseyin Pasha of Buda, a close relative of Sultan Mehmed IV, dispatched janisaries to Uyvar. According to a Habsburg spy embedded at the vizier's court, there was "common talk" (*gemeine sag*) of an imminent campaign against Vienna. Meanwhile Hungarian pashas and military commanders were assisting the rebels and aggressively expanding tributary lands inside Habsburg Hungary.⁴⁶

Szepessy was aware of the unique historical opportunity. His push for Ottoman intervention continued after his departure from the Porte; in fact, the Habsburg resident at the Porte considered Szepessy's machinations so dangerous that he wanted to have him murdered.⁴⁷ This happened against the backdrop of Köprülü's efforts to negotiate a permanent peace with Poland while the Vienna court desperately tried to convince the Polish king to resume war and convened emergency meetings on the worsening security situation in Hungary.⁴⁸ In late April 1673 Szepessy again arrived at the Porte in the company of five prominent Calvinist and Lutheran nobles. They brought with them letters of credence (*Creditivschreiben*) with the signatures and seals of "the entire Hungarian estates," called for the appointment of a Hungarian prince as the new ruler of Hungary, and promised the payment of a yearly tribute of 100,000 Reichthaler. They claimed that Hungarians were completely unified (*ganz einig*) and "desired the sultan as their master; the current [geopolitical] situation (*coniunctur*) could not be better and was not to be missed." Poland was in disarray, the French invasion of the Netherlands had forced the redeployment of Habsburg troops from Hungary, and 50,000 Hungarian rebels were ready to rise again.⁴⁹ Köprülü was sympathetic but told Szepessy and the other emissaries that "the Ottoman Porte was [still] very much occupied with Poland and Muscovy and presently could not get

unthreu sein. Diese guette coniunctur ... gewiss nicht versäumen, sich des vor langen Jahren hero verlangenden übrigen theils Ungarn ... anzunehmen"). Cf. Gergely 6, no. 269 (29 November 1672); HHStA, Turcica I. 144/2, fol. 133 (30 December 1672); I. 144/3, fol. 34, Kindsberg (12 January 1673); I. 145/1, fols. 21–2, Kindsberg (1. Relation, 13 April 1673); 140, Kindsberg (1 May 1673).

⁴⁶ HHStA, Turcica I. 144/3, fols. 21v, 26–7, Meninski (7 January 1673); I. 145/1, fols. 2, Kindsberg (6 April 1673); 120, Meninski (20 December 1672); 127r–v, Leopold to Kindsberg (23 April 1673); 168–70v, Leopold to Kindsberg (Laxenburg, 10 May 1673); I. 145/2, fols. 46–7v, Kindsberg (1 July 1673). Hüseyin Pasha served as vizier of Buda only temporarily while Ibrahim Pasha was engaged in Kamianets and Podolia [he returned to Buda in April 1673, Turcica I. 145/1, fol. 68, Kindsberg (2. Relation, 13 April 1673)].

⁴⁷ HHStA, Turcica I. 144/3, fols. 103, 112r (20 February 1673). Szepessy was then in Wallachia, probably at the court of Prince Grigore Ghica, a supporter of the Hungarian exiles (*ibid.*, fol. 103).

⁴⁸ Wagner, *Wojna polsko-turecka*, 1: 319, 323; KA, AFA 1673, *passim*. The papal nuncio Francesco Buonvisi was Vienna's secret weapon in Warsaw urging continuation of the Polish-Ottoman war. His letters reveal the extent of Vienna's fears (especially as the war against France intensified). Cf. Furio Diaz and Nicola Carranza, comp., *Francesco Buonvisi: Nunciatura a Varsavia*, 2 vols. (= vols. 75–6 of *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia*) (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano, 1965), 1: 131 ("Possono credere que no proseguendo i Turchi [la guerra] nella Polonia, si voltino in Ungheria") [1 March 1673]; 2: 86 ("È meglio per l'Imperatore che si avanzi [il Turco] in Polonia, più tosto che si volti verso l'Ungheria") [dated 29 June 1674]. Buonvisi was strictly instructed to act very carefully "not to irritate the Turk" (*ibid.*, 1: 91).

⁴⁹ HHStA, Turcica I. 145/1, fols. 171–3, Kindsberg to Aulic War Council (14 May 1673), esp. 172v. Cf. Gergely 6, no. 308, Szepessy to Teleki (Edirne, 7 May 1673).

involved.” But they would “without fail (*unfehlbarlich*) receive help and protection if. . . all Hungarian estates are. . . united in the conspiracy and there is not another outbreak of war.” In the meantime, they had his permission to stay on Ottoman lands; nothing would happen to them.⁵⁰

One might assume that Szepessy and the other Hungarian emissaries were unhappy with Köprülü’s response. But the opposite was true.⁵¹ They had a boisterous celebration (*Freudenfest*) in the quarters of the Transylvanian resident well into the morning hours; the party was so noisy that it could be heard all over the neighborhood and the next day “the entire town was full with the rebels’ gossip. . . that they now had really been accepted by the Turks.” The outraged Habsburg resident, Johann Christoph von Kindsberg, who apparently was awakened by the noise, wrote a bitter complaint to Köprülü who promptly gave orders “to remove the Hungarians as soon as possible.”⁵² But this gesture did not at all quell Kindsberg’s anxiety. He knew that Köprülü had already sent out agents to Hungary to verify the signatures and seals on the *Creditivschreiben* (which Szepessy had earlier handed to Köprülü’s *kahya*). He also knew of the presence of thousands of Hungarian rebel troops in the *vilayets* of Eger and Varat where many of them lived on lands that belonged to Ahmed Köprülü. And he was very much aware of ongoing peace negotiations with Poland, the readiness of Köprülü to reduce the tribute demanded from Poland, and a recent utterance by Köprülü about executing Cossack leader Petro Doroshenko “to calm down the Polish and Muscovite troubles.” And perhaps most importantly, Kindsberg’s extensive intelligence system at the Porte had informed him that “except for the sultan all Turks are shying away (*scheühen*) from war against Poland.”⁵³

It was most likely the Russian advance into Left Bank Ukraine in early 1673 which explains Köprülü’s noncommittal response to Szepessy. Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, in fact, had written a threatening letter to Köprülü in which he warned that continuation of war with Poland would inevitably lead to war with Russia. The tsar also boasted about mobilizing the other Christian kings and the Shah of Persia. While Köprülü mocked the Russians as military

⁵⁰ HHStA, Turcica I. 145/2, fols. 4v-5, Kindsberg to Aulic War Council (2 June 1673). Cf. the slightly different version reported by Szepessy’s translator who defected to the Habsburgs in late May 1673; the emphasis here is on Köprülü’s friendliness towards his visitors (“Sie seien ihm willkumb, und hörte gern, daß sie bey der Osmanischen Porten protection sucheten”); the only precondition for an Ottoman commitment to Hungary would be “the end of the Polish and Muscovite troubles” (*ibid.*, fol. 13).

⁵¹ Köprülü likely revealed more than was captured by Kindsberg’s informants at the Porte. Cf. the analysis of Giovanni Casanova, the Habsburg court’s veteran diplomat at the Porte: “Li Turchi hanno disegno di far la Guerra in Ungheria per questi ragioni: 1. Il Soltano ha preso gusto nella guerra per la facilita, che egli ha trovato nell’ occupar Kemietz [Kamianets], e nel conquisto di Polonia... 2. Il Vezir è applicatissimo giovane ed ambizioso di gloria...” (KA, AFA 173, fasc. 4, no. 13 [25 April 1673]). Casanova called Kindsberg a clown (*ciarlone*) whom few trusted at the Porte “because he does not keep secrets.” See also the Aulic War Council meeting of 1 July 1673 (based on local intelligence from Kassa): “Paul Zepesi [sic] è ritornato con buona risoluzione dai Turchi, che il Transilvano e li Turchi abbiano da assistare li Rebelli” (KA, AFA 1673, fasc. 7, no. 2).

⁵² HHStA, Turcica I. 145/2, fols. 5r-v, Kindsberg (2 June 1673).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, fols. 5v, 21r-v, Kindsberg (2, 19 June 1673).

amateurs the fact of 50,000 Russian troops in and around Kiev could not be denied; Köprülü tried to hide this information from the sultan because he was concerned that this would only strengthen the sultan's determination to march into Ukraine.⁵⁴ But, the inevitable happened – to the enormous relief of the Habsburg court. The Ottoman army became bogged down in the Ukrainian quagmire for the next three years. This is not surprising and can hardly be explained by the intense lobbying of Ukrainian Cossacks: Ukraine had become a geopolitical hotspot due to Russian, Crimean, Swedish, Prussian, and French interferences; the Polish offensive against the Ukrainian Cossacks had become internationalized and could hardly be ignored by the Ottoman Porte without losing face.⁵⁵

Szepessy and his associates spent the next three years waiting for Köprülü to end the war with Poland. The wait did not diminish Szepessy's zeal to overthrow the Habsburgs. Paradoxically, conditions for this possibility improved even in the absence of Ottoman intervention. In September 1673, when it became obvious the Ottomans were mired in Ukraine, the Habsburgs finally went to war against France; the "fake war" (*Scheinkrieg*), which had resulted in the abandonment of the Netherlands, finally turned into a hot war and thousands of Habsburg troops were relocated from Hungary to the Rhine.⁵⁶ It was during this time that Szepessy became one of the principal promoters and organizers of joint Ottoman-Hungarian raids. We find him traveling tirelessly among the exiles in the Eger and Varat vilayets, meeting with ordinary soldiers and their commanders, and acting as a liaison with Ottoman and Transylvanian commanders. He gave speeches claiming a mandate from Köprülü – as well as a sultanic edict (*ferman*) according to one source – "that the Transylvanians and Turks must provide help." In fact, hundreds, in some cases, more than a thousand, Ottoman soldiers joined Hungarian rebels in raids deep into Habsburg territory. They were led among others by Hüseyin Agha of Varat, a friend of Szepessy's, and the Janissary agha (*Janizar Aga*) of Eger. On at least one occasion

⁵⁴ Turcica I. 145/1, fols. 17v-19, Kindsberg (1. Relation, 13 April 1673). Köprülü did not take the tsar's threat seriously, *ibid.*, fol. 18r ("Viel mehrers eine verachtung wider Moscau und der Christenheit, alss Forcht denen Türkhen verursacht"). On Russian deployments on the left banks of the Dnipro River and the tsar's threat to go to war against the Ottoman Empire "if the sultan, the khan, and Doroshenko attack Poland," see also Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen* (A History of Russia Since the Oldest Times), vol. 6 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1961), 453-5.

⁵⁵ This is not the place to look into the reasons for the Ottoman entanglement in Ukraine despite Köprülü's documented reluctance. Cf. Dmytro Doroshenko and Jan Rypka, "Hejtman Petr Doroshenko a jeho turecká politika (Hetman Petro Doroshenko and his Turkish Policy)," *časopis Narodniho muzea* 1-2 (1933): 1-55; Metin Kunt, "17. yüzyilda osmanlı kuzey politikasi üzerine bir yorum," *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi dergisi. Beşeri bilimler* 4-5 (1976-7): 111-16; Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, "Ottoman Podillja: The Eyalet of Kamianets 1672-1699," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 15. 1-2 (1992): 87-101; Il'ja V. Zajcev, "La politique Turque de Petro Dorošenko. Documents du fonds de Wojciech Bobowski à la BNF," *Cahiers du monde russe et post-soviétique* 50. 2-3 (April-September 2009): 511-32.

⁵⁶ Oscar Redlich, *Weltmacht des Barock. Österreich in der Zeit Kaiser Leopolds I.* (Vienna: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1961), 120-4; Luc Panhuysen, *Rampjaar 1672. Hoe de Republiek aan de ondergang ontsnapte* (Amsterdam-Antwerpen: Atlas, 2011), 307-24 ("Verraden en verlaten").

the pasha of Eger joined in person. And Szepessy did his best to inspire the rebel masses with his speeches that promised that 40,000 Tatars and Turks would join them as soon as the Polish war was over. The pashas of Varat and Eger were ready to move; it was only a question of time when they would occupy all of Hungary and create an Ottoman vassal state like Transylvania. As usual Szepessy appealed to God that “His Holy Majesty turn out everything to the better (*mind jól adja ő szent felsége*).”⁵⁷

Szepessy did not return to the Porte until March 1675. He had temporarily become commander-in-chief (*il Generale*) of the Hungarian exile army stationed in the vilayets of Varat and Eger. But in the meantime, he dispatched the Calvinist noble Fábián Farkas, another top officer of the exile army as well as a close family friend.⁵⁸ Farkas had once been an important Habsburg border commander; in April 1670 he had handed Tokaj Fortress to popular insurgents and subsequently become a leader in the Hungarian rebel army. He had close ties with Ottoman military commanders, played a crucial role in keeping the rebel army together after its flight into Ottoman territory in late 1672, and had expressed his eagerness to join Szepessy in meetings with Köprülü.⁵⁹ Like Szepessy he placed great trust in Köprülü. In one of his letters Farkas wrote about Köprülü’s astounding humanity toward the suffering; he had heard from his Ottoman contacts that Köprülü had listened “with tears in his eyes” (*könyvvel megtelvé a szeme*) to the pleas of István Petrőczy’s children on behalf of their father who was then wasting away in a Transylvanian prison. Petrőczy was promptly set free and joined Farkas in Varat.⁶⁰ Few men were more qualified than Farkas to inform Köprülü about the state of the Hungarian rebel army in exile.

Farkas urged immediate Ottoman intervention when he met with Köprülü’s *kahya* on 17 April 1674 and with Köprülü himself on 20 July 1674. There was no better opportunity he argued. Religious persecution and army terror had become so unbearable that more and more people were fleeing into Ottoman territory. In fact, the “[rebel] army [was] growing daily; Hungarian nobles alone made up more than 6,000 in its ranks.” The population of Hungary was so traumatized that “all [Habsburg] subjects would rush toward” the invading Ottoman army “and submit themselves to the sultan as they had long wished.” If despite his many promises Köprülü was not ready to dispatch “the armies of Varat, Eger and Jenő to assist and help us” then he should at

⁵⁷ Gergely 6, no. 322, Szepessy to Teleki (4 July 1673), p. 474; no. 354, Miklós Forgács to Teleki (26 October 1673); no. 355, László Kubinyi to Teleki (26 October 1673); two memoranda handed to Köprülü by Habsburg resident Kindsberg, in *Turcica* I. 145/4, fols. 88, 91–2, *Ad Supremum Vezirium Excelsae Portae Ottomanicae* (12 December 1673; 25 January 1674); Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, 6: 299.

⁵⁸ Farkas told Köprülü’s *kahya* that he was acting in the name of Pál Szepessy, “the general of the Hungarians” (*Turcica* I. 146/2, fol. 21v, Kindsberg [7 February 1675]). On Szepessy’s closeness to Farkas and his family, see Deák, *A bujdosók levéltára*, 249; Bethlen Miklós levelei, 1: 630. On Farkas, see also *ibid.*, 1: 282, 638, 670. On the Farkas family, see Nagy, *Magyarország családai*, 2 (4): 117.

⁵⁹ Gergely 6, no. 269, Menyhárt Keczer to Teleki (29 November 1672); no. 274, Dénes Bánffy to Teleki (15 December 1672); no. 354, Miklós Forgács to Teleki (26 October 1673), p. 520.

⁶⁰ Gergely 6, no. 364, Fábián Farkas to Teleki (Szalonta near Varat, 10 November 1673), p. 536.

least authorize rebel commanders to recruit Ottoman Turks, Bulgarians [sic], and Hungarians. This could happen in secret and at no cost to the Porte. In the meantime, they were ready “to pay homage to the Great Sovereign and submit capitulations to the greater glory of His long and invincible imperial rule.” Köprülü refused to commit himself: the open break with the Habsburgs could only come after the end of war with Poland; in the meantime, conducting a clandestine war against the Germans was also unacceptable. When “everything has returned into a peaceful state they would receive public help and protection.”⁶¹

Habsburg intelligence analysts were puzzled that Farkas would have to beg Köprülü for military support and that Köprülü refused to give it. Too obvious was the involvement of Ottoman troops in an intensifying cross-border war that pitted the Hungarian rebel army and Ottomans troops against the Habsburg occupation army. An Aulic War Council analysis from August 1674, for example, found “that the Turks are not only giving support and shelter (*Unterschlaiff und Receptacula*) [to the rebels] but they are now effectively operating with them and next to them in much greater numbers. . . without any compunction (*Scheu*) and respect for the peace.” A similar analysis from October 1674 ascertained that Ottomans pashas and border commanders “were fomenting the rebels. . . and even declared themselves their leaders (*principales*); most recently 2,500 Turks [attacked] His Majesty’s army with 1,500 rebels in tow.”⁶²

Was Köprülü playing a shell game to confuse the Habsburgs? It is interesting that Pál Szepessy interpreted the situation quite differently. Yes, Fábíán Farkas had not achieved what Szepessy and other exiles were hoping for: Köprülü was not yet ready to break the peace with the Habsburgs and did not grant the large Ottoman troop contingents they asked for. But it was enough for Szepessy that Farkas had received reassurances – renewed during another mission to the Porte in February 1675 – that the grand vizier would inevitably help Hungary after the conclusion of peace with Poland. In March 1675 Szepessy rushed to the Porte. God was guiding him, he claimed, and His holy protection would bring about “the happy success of [their] affairs (*dolgainknak boldogítása*).” It might take time and patience but “the Free and Holy Will of the Commanding God would reveal everything in the near future and make visible what was now [still] secret.” Szepessy firmly believed that Köprülü would keep his promise despite the disappointments and hardships of the last years. He had endured them with joy, Szepessy claimed, as they were part of God’s

⁶¹ HHSTA, Turcica I. 145/4, fol. 155v, Kindsberg (6 May 1674); I. 146/1, Kindsberg (8 July 1674), fols. 21–2v, Anlage A (“Proposizioni fatte dal Farkas Fabian...al Grand Vezier”); Kindsberg (8 August 1674), fols. 24r–v; “Memoriale instructionis pro generoso domino Fabiano Farkas (26 May 1674),” in Deák, *A bujdosók levéltára*, 242–43. Interestingly, Farkas never conveyed the request of an *ahdname* (*athname*) to Köprülü even though it figured prominently in his instructions by Szepessy and other exiles.

⁶² HHSTA, Turcica I. 146/1, fols. 44, 68, *Opinio des Hofkriegsrats* (August 1674, n.d.; 14 October 1674). The number of Ottoman troops was most likely exaggerated by Habsburg commanders, see Michels, *Habsburg Empire under Siege*, 303.

plan. He prayed every day and was sure that God would “before long reveal a better outcome (*külömbet mutat*).”⁶³

Lobbying for War Against the Habsburg Empire

During the next ten months Szepessy used his extensive support network in Ottoman Hungary, Transylvania, and at the Porte to lobby Köprülü for an Ottoman invasion of Hungary. He was helped in his endeavor by a number of developments. Most importantly, Köprülü was in fact getting tired of the war in Poland and expressed his eagerness to move against the Habsburg Empire. Only Kaymakam Kara Mustafa and the sultan were holding him back. This rift in the Ottoman leadership was exploited by French diplomacy which was eager to deflect the Ottomans from Poland to Hungary.⁶⁴ At the same time it became clearer than ever that the Hungarian rebels “had many sympathizers in the sandjaks of Szolnok, Hatvani, Eger, Buda, Ersekujvar etc. [sic].” These Ottoman Hungarophiles and their supporters at the Porte – according to Habsburg intelligence “the majority of the Turks” – were pushing for war in Hungary. In fact, the year 1675 brought a constant stream of complaints from Hungarian pashas and border commanders about the Habsburg occupation army. When Habsburg soldiers took 200 Ottoman prisoners in June 1675 Köprülü threatened the Habsburg resident Kindsberg with war: “[This and] other excesses . . . are intolerable and will lead to a new war which the Ottoman Porte could easily arrange.” Kindsberg made things only worse when he dared to bring up the incursions of Ottoman troops and rebels into Habsburg Hungary (which he believed Köprülü had secretly ordered). Köprülü exploded with rage and stated: “Until now we have not accepted the rebels in order to keep the peace but because His Imperial Majesty . . . has started to break the peace I will from now on provide real help to the rebels.” Kindsberg was dumbfounded by Köprülü’s hostility and great arrogance (*grosser Hochmueth*).⁶⁵

Clearly, Ottoman–Habsburg relations were deteriorating rather rapidly and Szepessy was doing his best to exploit the situation. We get only a few glimpses of his activities during this period as he successfully evaded Habsburg spies. But the little the Habsburg court learned touched a raw nerve. In June 1675 “[Szepessy] was exploiting the good [geopolitical] situation (*gute coniunctur*) and soliciting tirelessly for Turkish help claiming to have won the game against the Germans.”⁶⁶ A report from September 1675 established that Szepessy had

⁶³ Gergely 7, no. 18, Szepessy to Teleki (31 March 1675), pp. 27–9; EOE 16: 8 (arrival in Edirne on 14 March 1675). On Farkas’ meeting with Köprülü’s *kahya*, see Turcica I. 146/2, fols. 18r–v, 25, Kindsberg (7 February 1675).

⁶⁴ Wagner, *Wojna polsko-turecka*, 1: 207; 2: 228–29. Vienna made every effort to undermine Polish–Ottoman peace negotiations (*ibid.*, 2: 220); Zbigniew Wójcik, *Rzeczpospolita wobec Turcji i Rosji 1674–1679* (The Commonwealth Confronting Turkey and Russia 1674–1679) (Wrocław-Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1976), 51–53.

⁶⁵ HHStA, Turcica I. 146/3, fols. 19v, 22r–v, 24v–25, Kindsberg to Aulic War Council (17 June 1675); “Memoriale instructionis,” 243.

⁶⁶ HHStA, Turcica I. 146/3, fol. 41v, Kindsberg (17 June 1675).

already spent many months at the Porte.⁶⁷ Apparently, he had been quite successful. In fact, Köprülü had just written a letter to Prince Apafi of Transylvania, an important supporter of the Hungarian exiles, in which he vowed to help the “oppressed Hungarians according to the glorious custom of the Porte.” The grand vizier informed Apafi that he had begun peace negotiations with the Polish crown and once peace was actually concluded he would follow the practice of the Porte and “lift up all the oppressed and in particular those who submit themselves voluntarily.”⁶⁸ Finally, in December 1675 the Aulic War Council instructed Kindsberg to do everything in his power “to malign (*schwarz machen*) Szepessy at the Porte so that he no longer would have any access and, more importantly, be punished.”⁶⁹

In early January 1676 a Habsburg spy penetrated a secret meeting of Szepessy with Ahmed Köprülü. Szepessy was accompanied by Hüseyin Agha, the top military commander of the Varat vilayet. They complained bitterly about recent atrocities by Habsburg troops against Hungarian rebels living under the protection of the pasha of Varat in and around the tributary town of Debrecen. Several of Szepessy’s close associates had been put in irons and led away into captivity. Similarly, Habsburg troops had broken into the Eger vilayet and taken many Ottoman prisoners. If we can believe Szepessy and Hüseyin Agha, several of the captured sipahis had been tortured and impaled. They insisted that the Habsburgs “have already started the war against the Ottoman Porte.” Köprülü should immediately deploy troops to defend the borders and by doing so “also provide the [Hungarian] rebels with the long-sought and promised protection.”⁷⁰

Köprülü’s response was delivered a few days later by the grand vizier’s *kahya*, Süleiman Agha. Köprülü was determined to end the war with Poland as soon as possible. But Süleiman Agha urged patience. He explained, “[we] are not used to opening the gate to another enemy before we have closed the gate to one enemy.” These were serious matters (*ezen nagy dolgok*) that required careful deliberation and the presence of the sultan who was out hunting. In the meantime, the grand vizier had instructed Prince Apafi of Transylvania to “put aside everything else. . . and bring about peace with the Poles.” In fact, as soon as the war with Poland was over Apafi would have the opportunity to invade Hungary and unite “both Hungarian realms under

⁶⁷ He stayed at the Porte without apparent interruption from March 1675 to January 1676. Cf. Angyal, *Késmárki Thököly Imre*, 1: 95–96; Gergely 7, no. 74, Gábor Kende to Teleki (23 November 1675), p. 93.

⁶⁸ HHStA, Turcica I. 146/3, fols. 92v–93, Kindsberg to Aulic War Council (15 September 1675); Bethlen Miklós levelei, 1: 276, 669, Bethlen to Teleki (5 July 1675).

⁶⁹ HHStA, Turcica I. 146/4, fol. 114, Aulic War Council to Kindsberg (27 December 1675).

⁷⁰ HHStA, Turcica I. 147/1, fols. 21r–v, Kindsberg to Aulic War Council (11 January 1676). The Habsburg attack generated a great shock in the Hungarian exile community; its leaders were urging Szepessy to tell Köprülü that he should “find a remedy as soon as possible (*mentül hamarabb*).” If Köprülü refused to act “our nation will be in extreme danger” (Gergely 7, no. 86, Pál Wesselényi et al. to Teleki [14 December 1675], pp. 112–13).

one government (*a két magyar birodalmak egy guberniuma alá*).⁷¹ That this was Köprülü's plan is confirmed by Habsburg intelligence from spring or summer 1676: Ottoman emissaries had in fact instructed Apafi to assist the Hungarian exiles in an invasion of Upper Hungary. The invasion, which would come after an Ottoman-Polish armistice, was to target Kassa, the Habsburg capital of Upper Hungary. Once Kassa had been seized Apafi would be crowned King of Hungary.⁷²

Szepessy was optimistic. Why would Köprülü have instructed Prince Apafi to help the exiles "if the Sublime Porte and the emperor [sultan] were not willing to help?" He firmly believed that the Ottoman army would also invade. After all this was the commonly voiced opinion among his Ottoman contacts. In a letter to the Transylvanian magnate Mihály Teleki, Szepessy emphasized the outrage of Hungary's Ottoman powerbrokers about the Debrecen attack: emissaries from Eger and Buda were in meetings with Köprülü and messengers were arriving daily at the Porte from all major Hungarian fortresses. In fact, new calls for a campaign against Hungary were coming from everywhere (*mindenfélől*) in the Ottoman Empire. Szepessy believed that God's plan was finally coming to fruition: "God, the Lord, is surely taking pity on us. . . . God will certainly turn everything to the better and bless [our] many bitter trials."⁷³

After his return from the Porte, Szepessy devoted himself to preparing the invasion of Habsburg Hungary. Few individuals were in a better position to do so given his close contacts with the leaders of the Hungarian rebel army, who, like Szepessy, were veterans of the 1670 and 1672 revolts. Getting ready for a large-scale invasion was easier said than done. After more than three years in exile the rebel army confronted serious problems. Most importantly, there was a breakdown of discipline and rank-and-file soldiers under the leadership of rogue warlords raided not only Habsburg lands but also Ottoman lands, which had led to tensions with the pashas of Eger and Varat. There was thus a serious threat of alienating Ottoman powerbrokers even though these were just as eager as the rebels to invade Habsburg Hungary. What precisely Szepessy and others did to defuse this threat remains unclear; all we know is that he and his closest associates trusted in Köprülü's unwavering support. Had he not granted them refuge on his lands? Also, Szepessy had his agents at the Porte; one of them, András Radics, came back in July 1676 with Köprülü's reassurances. Nevertheless, provisions, munitions, and money which had been provided by Ottoman pashas in the past were apparently no

⁷¹ Gergely 7, no. 103, György Brankovics to Teleki (13 January 1676), p. 140; no. 109, Szepessy to Teleki (20 January 1676), p. 148. Brankovics was Szepessy's translator during meetings with Köprülü.

⁷² "Titkos jelentés a bujdosók tervéről (A Secret Report about the Exiles' Plan)," *EOE* 16: 244. On Apafi's mediation efforts in Poland (with explicit orders by Köprülü), see Wagner, *Wojna polsko-turecka*, 2: 219–20; Gergely 7, no. 207, Jan Sobieski to Teleki (16 August 1676); no. 215, Apafi to Teleki (24 October 1676).

⁷³ Gergely 7, no. 103, p. 140; no. 109, pp. 148–9; no. 118, Szepessy to Teleki (24 January 1676), p. 159. On emissaries dispatched to Köprülü by the pashas of Varat and Uyvar, see *ibid.*, no. 117, János Daczó to Teleki (23 January 1676), p. 157.

longer forthcoming. One of Szepessy's principal concerns therefore became finding sufficient pay and provisions for the rebel army's soldiers. This was likely the main reason why he was traveling from place to place in Transylvania to garner the Transylvanian elite's support. Feeding rebel soldiers and their families became all the more important as massive numbers of peasants, townsmen, and petty nobles fled among the Hungarian exiles in spring 1676. These masses had to be integrated into an army that was constantly growing in numbers but poorly organized.⁷⁴

Szepessy knew that the rebel invasion of Hungary could not occur before the end of the Polish-Ottoman war (as he had been told many times by Köprülü). It appears he tried to speed things up during a secret meeting with Polish King Jan Sobieski in spring or summer 1676. There is no reference to the meeting anywhere in Szepessy's correspondence nor in the correspondence of his Hungarian and Transylvanian contacts. Habsburg spies at the Porte also missed the meeting even though Szepessy traveled directly to Edirne after his return from Poland. The whole affair came to the attention of the Habsburg court by accident when a Polish secret agent was intercepted in Upper Hungary. The agent was carrying letters addressed to Szepessy and other Upper Hungarian nobles including the sheriff of Abaúj County.⁷⁵

The scheme revealed by the agent and the intercepted letters is perplexing: Szepessy was offering Jan Sobieski the Hungarian crown.⁷⁶ According to the Polish agent the plan had been hatched by the Hungarian exiles to protect themselves against a possible Ottoman annexation of Transylvania. They feared that the coming Ottoman-Habsburg war would lead to Apafi's removal. Presumably Habsburg Hungary and Transylvania would then become new vilayets and "experience the fate of Old Bulgaria." The great benefit to Jan Sobieski was obvious: he would unite the Polish and Hungarian crowns and extend his rule over Silesia and Moravia. He would then be too powerful to be removed by the Ottomans, especially since he also had the support of the French king. Szepessy was convinced that the Porte would approve Sobieski's ascension to the Hungarian throne. The new king of Hungary and Poland would, of course, recognize the sultan as his overlord and become his vassal. And there was no doubt in Szepessy's mind that Köprülü and the sultan

⁷⁴ Fábíán Farkas to Szepessy (23 March 1676), in Deák, *A bujdosók levéltára*, 248–251, esp. 250–51; Gergely 7, no. 140, Pál Wesselenyi to Teleki (23 March 1676), p. 187; HHStA, Turcica I. 147/1, fol. 77 (2 April 1676), Kindsberg's refusal to believe Köprülü's *kahya*'s assertion that Szepessy and Fábíán Farkas "had been gotten rid of without achieving anything." Nobody in Vienna believed this (see *ibid.*, fol. 170, Leopold to Kindsberg [22 June 1676]). On the Hungarian exiles' appeals to the Porte for protection against the pasha of Varat, see Turcica I. 147/1, fol. 165v, Kindsberg (17 June 1676); Gergely 7, no. 144, László Kubinyi to Teleki (4 April 1676). On the Radics mission, see Turcica I. 147/2, fol. 1v (2 July 1676); EOE 16: 48.

⁷⁵ "Titkos jelentés a bujdosók tervéről," EOE 16: 244–6 (1676, n.d.).

⁷⁶ Nowhere in the scholarly literature have I found any reference to the idea that Jan Sobieski should become the next King of Hungary at the mercy of the sultan. The inspiration may have come from the efforts of Transylvanian Prince György II Rákóczi to create a composite Polish-Hungarian state during the 1650s. Such a state had existed at least twice in the Hungarian Middle Ages. Cf. Pálffy, *Hungary between two Empires*, 54, 159; Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 54–55, 80–85.

would welcome the huge tributes that Sobieski was going to collect from both Poland and Hungary.⁷⁷

What sense can we make of this plot? Was it part of Köprülü's efforts to end the war with Poland as soon as possible? This is suggested by the fact that Szepessy immediately rushed to Edirne after his return from Poland (a visit we don't know anything about). A Habsburg intelligence analyst proposed that the scheme could have been designed to sow distrust between the Habsburgs and their ally Sobieski. If Sobieski was indeed secretly plotting with Köprülü to become king of Hungary this would undermine Habsburg efforts to torpedo Ottoman-Polish peace negotiations. The few known facts indicate that it was a serious matter that could not possibly have been only a brainchild of Pál Szepessy or the Hungarian exiles.⁷⁸ We know, for example, that Jan Sobieski's French wife had traveled to Paris to suggest the plot to King Louis XIV. Also, Crown Marshall Stanisław Lubomirski, one of Poland's most powerful politicians and a strong supporter of peace with Köprülü, had recently visited Upper Hungary with several hundred of his men. He apparently had been in touch with leading anti-Habsburg conspirators. It is finally noteworthy that Szepessy and his supporters had won over many Catholic nobles to join the plan. Did these Catholics prefer a Catholic to a Calvinist king?⁷⁹

Why mention this puzzling episode which had no lasting historical consequences? It is important for two principal reasons: first, it reveals that Szepessy had become a player in a geopolitical game that Köprülü was determined to win. While Köprülü was highly suspicious of French overtures to the Hungarian exiles he in fact welcomed French pressure on the Polish king to make peace with the Porte. He also was determined to drive a wedge between Poles and Russians, especially after the defection of Ukrainian Cossack leader Petro Doroshenko from sultan to tsar in January 1676 (which greatly increased the danger of war with Russia over Ukraine).⁸⁰ Szepessy knew about these realities and likely embraced the plot to support Köprülü's agenda. Also, Szepessy's outreach to the Polish king demonstrates his belief that the Ottoman army would inevitably gain victory in 1676. He was not alone. Polish intelligence gathered in Transylvania – and presented at the Polish Sejm in March 1676 – suggested that “the Turks were ready to slam Poland with the kind of force

⁷⁷ “Titkos jelentés a bujdások tervéről,” esp. 244.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 246. Szepessy's conviction that the Ottomans could easily occupy all of Poland and Hungary was not uncommon at the time. Cf. Wójcik, *Rzeczpospolita wobec Turcji i Rosji 1674–1679*, 86, 100–1; Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *Podole pod panowaniem tureckim. Ejalet Kamieniecki 1672–1699* (Podolia under Turkish Rule. The Ejalet of Kamianets 1672–1699) (Warsaw: POLCZEK, 1994), 47–8 (Ottoman plan to seize Cracow via Hungary; Kara Mustafa bragging about taking Gdańsk [Danzig]).

⁷⁹ “Titkos jelentés a bujdások tervéről,” 245; On Lubomirski's advocacy of peace, see Wójcik, *Rzeczpospolita wobec Turcji i Rosji 1674–1679*, 87.

⁸⁰ On the defection of Petro Doroshenko, see Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii*, 6: 491–97; 7: 197–201, 207–08. As long as Right Bank Ukraine remained an Ottoman vassal, Köprülü was not interested in war with Russia. Cf. HHStA, Turcia I. 147/1, fols. 37, 101, Kindsberg to Aulic War Council (18 January, 16 April 1676); Woliński, “Wojna polsko-turecka 1672–1676,” 381–82, 384, 386, 389; Victor Ostapchuk, “Cossack Ukraine In and Out of Ottoman Orbit, 1648–1681,” in *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kunčević (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013), 123–52, esp. 147–48.

that they had employed in Crete [Candia].” After seizing Cracow they would advance “all the way to [Brandenburg] Prussia” (*az do Prusy*). Given the weakness of the Polish army this was quite plausible; and Köprülü had already given orders to the Crimean Khan for a coordinated military campaign.⁸¹ In fact, Ottoman troops were poised to move through Habsburg Hungary and Transylvania – not just Moldavia and Wallachia – in an all-out effort to destroy the Polish enemy once and for all. Szepessy was very much aware of this and his meeting with the Polish King may have been an attempt to prevent an Ottoman attack that could have left the Hungarian exiles out in the cold.⁸²

In the end, Prince Apafi remained the designated future king of Hungary and Szepessy swore allegiance to him twice on 26 and 27 September 1676; it was “the rightful judgement of God’s Majesty.” On 7 October 1676 all ranks of the rebel army also swore allegiance to Apafi; a force of at least 8,000 rebels was ready to invade with Transylvanian support. And when the Polish-Ottoman peace agreement was signed on 17 October 1676 multitudes of Hungarian refugees in Ottoman Hungary and Transylvania were eagerly waiting for Köprülü’s signal to invade. The same holds true for Prince Apafi and Transylvania’s Protestant elite.⁸³ In Vienna by contrast fear took over: it was assumed that Ahmed Köprülü would now go to war against the Habsburg Empire.⁸⁴

Szepessy’s reaction to the news of Ahmed Köprülü’s death on 3 November 1676 has not been recorded. It is very likely that he shared the general distress, confusion, and sadness that took hold of the Hungarian exile community. After all, Köprülü’s many promises for Ottoman military intervention had suddenly been reduced to nothing. The new grand vizier Kara Mustafa was “inclined to get rid of the rebels.”⁸⁵ This was the opinion of Habsburg resident Kindsberg who sent a triumphant missive to Vienna about Ahmed Köprülü’s death. In

⁸¹ Wójcik, *Rzeczpospolita wobec Turcji i Rosji 1674–1679*, 51; Wagner, *Wojna polsko-turecka*, 2: 219; HHStA, Turcica I. 147/1, fols. 38r–v, Kindsberg to Aulic War Council (18 January 1676) on Ottoman mobilizations and commander Ibrahim Pasha’s plan to burn down L’viv and advance all the way to Lublin. On the weakness of the Polish army, see Wagner, *ibid.*, 2: 237–38, 245. According to Russian intelligence, Köprülü demanded all of Podolia, Volhynia, and “Ukraine on both sides of the Dnepr” in return for peace (Solov’ev, *Istoriia Rossii*, 6: 217–18).

⁸² HHStA, Turcica I. 147/1, fols. 1r–v, Leopold I to Kindsberg (5 January 1676); Wójcik, *Rzeczpospolita wobec Turcji i Rosji 1674–1679*, 51; Gergely 7, no. 109, p. 148 (here with some optimism that such an attack could actually be beneficial “to our affairs”).

⁸³ Deák, *A bujdosók levéltára*, 46–50. Szepessy’s signature appears together with that of the still obscure Imre Thököly (*ibid.*, 46–7); Michels, *Habsburg Empire under Siege*, 4, 298, 317, 335; Zsolt Trócsányi, *Teleki Mihály. Erdély és a kurucmozgalom 1690-ig* (Mihály Teleki. Transylvania and the Kuruc Movement until 1690) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972), 182–83.

⁸⁴ This expectation was shared by Russian, Polish, and French observers. Cf. Solov’ev, *Istoriia Rossii*, 6: 525 (“Kogda mir sostoitsia, to sultan poidet voinoiu na tsesarskie zemli [When peace is established the sultan will go to war against the lands of the emperor]”); Angyal, *Késmárki Thököly Imre*, 1: 134–35.

⁸⁵ I agree with one of the manuscript reviewers who pointed out that Kara Mustafa’s interest shifted away from Hungary to Ukraine and Russia. Cf. Georg B. Michels, “How the Russo-Turkish War over Ukraine (1677–81) Changed the Course of Hungarian History,” *Hungarian Studies Review* 49, no. 2 (September 2022): 204–07.

fact, the Habsburg commander-in-chief in Upper Hungary reported in December 1676 that Ottoman troops were launching attacks on Hungarian rebels.⁸⁶ It seemed that all of Szepessy's dreams for a joint Hungarian-Ottoman future had fallen apart.

Szepessy did not return to the Porte for more than five years; he seems to have become *persona non grata*. However, in December 1681 he suddenly received an urgent call to come to Istanbul and in March 1682 he was on his way. What exactly transpired at the Porte and whether or not Szepessy met with Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa remains unknown. All we know is that Kara Mustafa had Szepessy join his court during the campaign against Vienna. At the very least this demonstrates that Szepessy continued to enjoy significant prestige among Ottoman powerbrokers (even if Kara Mustafa had no place for him initially). This was well understood by the young Lutheran magnate Imre Thököly who called Szepessy into his inner circle in September 1682.⁸⁷ This is not surprising for another reason. Many of the men with whom Szepessy had served in the rebel armies of 1670 and 1672 were now found in Imre Thököly's entourage.

Clearly, Pál Szepessy's engagement with Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü greatly contributed to subsequent developments. His persistent lobbying set the scene for the 1682 Ottoman military intervention in Upper Hungary and the 1683 campaign against Vienna. A French diplomat got it right when he claimed that Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa finally gave in "after many years of [Hungarian] perseverance and the promises so often reiterated by his Predecessor (*son Prédécesseur*)."⁸⁸ When joint detachments of Hungarian rebels and Ottoman soldiers seized Kassa, the Habsburg capital of Upper Hungary, in August 1682, they only carried out what Szepessy had already been promised more than ten years earlier. And the multiple declarations of loyalty ("letters of credence") to Sultan Mehmed IV that Szepessy had extracted from Hungary's nobles and aristocrats certainly prepared the ground for the Hungarian elite's mass defection to the Ottomans in 1683. Last but not least, the great enthusiasm with which Imre Thököly, the new Ottoman-anointed king of Hungary, was welcomed in popular milieu has its origins in the pro-Ottoman speeches that Szepessy and others gave during the 1670 and 1672 revolts.⁸⁹ It is high time that historians turn to the invisible actors –

⁸⁶ Turcica I. 147/2, fols. 145–8, Kindsberg (25 November 1676), esp. 145v–146; I. 147/3, Kindsberg (16 March 1677), fol. 6 ("So ist er incliniert, die rebellen abzuschaffen"); KA, Exp. Prot. 1676, fols. 862v, 864v–66, General Carolo Strassoldo to Aulic War Council (7 and 11 December). On the exiles' response to Köprülü's death and Kindsberg's letter to Emperor Leopold I (dated 6 November 1676), see Michels, *Habsburg Empire under Siege*, 3–4, 363–64.

⁸⁷ TMAO 6: 182 (call to Istanbul, 9 December 1681); 212 (handpicked by Porte [*nevezetesen denominált*] as liaison to rebel army, 11 February 1682); 219 (dispatched to Porte, 16 March 1672). Cf. Benczédi, *Rendiség, abszolutizmus és centralizáció*, 127, 176; Angyal, *Késmárki Thököly Imre*, 1: 279–80.

⁸⁸ Jean Béranger, "Louis XIV, l'Empereur et l'Europe de l'Est," *XVII^e Siècle* 31, no. 2 (1979): 173–94, here 191 (citing M. de La Croix, the secretary of the French ambassador in Istanbul).

⁸⁹ On the seizure of Kassa and the enthusiastic reception Thököly received here and elsewhere in Upper Hungary, see Varga, *Válaszúton. Thököly Imre és Magyarország*, 29–30; Győző Bruckner, *A*

men like Szepessy – who forged the Ottoman-Hungarian alliance that culminated at the gates of Vienna in 1683.⁹⁰

Some Concluding Thoughts

In Habsburg and Central European (Slovak, Hungarian, and Austrian) historiographies the Habsburg-Ottoman encounter in Hungary has typically been cast as a history of military confrontation. This holds true particularly for the time period under consideration in this article. It is commonly assumed that the Habsburg army gained a decisive military victory over the troops of Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü during the 1663–64 Ottoman-Habsburg War. Studies focus on the Battle of St. Gotthard (Mogersdorf) and the Vasvár Peace Treaty, which supposedly led to the disengagement of the Ottoman Empire from Habsburg Hungary. The general agreement seems to be that the Ottoman Empire was in decline after the Battle of St. Gotthard and the Habsburg Empire's ascendancy in Hungary had been assured.⁹¹ It is as if the subsequent Ottoman defeat at the gates of Vienna and the so-called “Great Turkish War” (1683–99) were pre-programmed. Against this backdrop Hungarian scholars have cast the Ottoman defeats of the 1680s as a Hungarian dream come true after more than 200 years of languishing under the “Turkish Yoke” (*Türkisches Joch*). The brutal military conquest of Ottoman Hungary by marauding Habsburg armies is cast as a “war of liberation” (*Befreiungskrieg*).⁹² Few historians have acknowledged the extremely

reformáció és ellenreformáció története a Szepességen (The History of Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the Szepes Region) (Budapest: Grill, 1922), 379–83.

⁹⁰ Hungarian historians remain fixated on the figure of Imre Thököly, who did not play an important role in Hungarian-Ottoman relations until the early 1680s. He only followed in the footsteps of older and more experienced men like Pál Szepessy. Cf. Varga, *Válaszúton. Thököly Imre és Magyarország* and most recently, Gábor Kármán, “King Thököly in Chains: The Fall of the Ottoman Tributary State of Upper Hungary,” in *Tributaries and Peripheries of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Gábor Kármán (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 264–89. That Thököly was a product of the pro-Ottoman noble milieu in which he grew up was already observed more than a hundred-thirty years ago by his most important biographer, in Angyal, *Késmárki Thököly Imre 1657–1705*, 1: 121 (“The child completely stood under the influence of those among the exiles who were perhaps the most fervent in seeking [Turkish] patronage [*pártfogás*]”).

⁹¹ For a representative Hungarian view of the 1663–64 Ottoman-Habsburg War, see Ferenc Tóth, *Saint-Gotthard 1664. Une bataille européenne* (Paris: Charles Lavauzelle, 2007), esp. 108, 133 (superiority of “occidental” and “Christian” armies), dust jacket (“victoire éclatante”). The Hungarian view was recently reiterated by most of the contributors to Karin Sperl, Martin Scheutz, and Arno Strohmeyer, eds., *Die Schlacht von Mogersdorf/St. Gotthard und der Friede von Eisenburg/Vasvár 1664. Rahmenbedingungen, Akteure, Auswirkungen und Rezeption eines europäischen Ereignisses*. Vol. 108 of *Burgenländische Forschungen*. (Eisenstadt: Liebenprint Grafik, 2016). But note the critical contributions of the Ottomanists Gábor Ágoston, M. Fatih Calışır, and Hakan Karagöz (ibid., 89–100, 121–33, 207–14).

⁹² For standard treatments, see Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Enemy at the Gate. Habsburgs, Ottomans, and the Battle for Europe* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), esp. 201–24 (“Storming Buda”); Ferenc Szakály, *Hungaria Eliberata. Die Rückeroberung von Buda im Jahre 1686 und Ungarns Befreiung von der Osmanenherrschaft* (Budapest: Corvina, 1986); Ignác Acsády, *Der Befreiungskrieg oder Ungarns Befreiung von der Türkenherrschaft (1683–1689)* (Budapest: Victor Hornyánszky, 1909). For a recent

violent dimension of this conquest which led, for example, to the ruthless annihilation of the Muslim and Jewish communities of Buda.⁹³

Pál Szepessy saw Habsburg power for what it was through his own bitter experience. He was not surprised by the viciousness of the Habsburg soldatesca after 1683. He had already seen it all before during the 1660s and 1670s. His impassioned pleas to Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü all focused on the utter destructiveness and terror of the Habsburg military occupation of Hungary. In his mind, the Ottomans were much more benevolent masters. Most importantly, they would not persecute him and his fellow Protestants for their religious beliefs. Living under the Porte's protective umbrella in a Hungarian vassal state – like Transylvania – seemed to offer better prospects of tranquility and prosperity to Hungarians. In fact, the fervent Calvinist Szepessy was convinced that God had chosen the Ottomans as His avengers – as God's instruments who would help Hungarians take up the sword, resist, and destroy the Habsburg army. It is likely that Szepessy was familiar with the apocalyptic sermons of Hungarian Protestant pastors who cast the Ottomans as liberators from the yoke of the Austrian Antichrist. These sermons circulated widely in Hungarian Protestant communities.⁹⁴

Many questions for future research are raised by Szepessy's engagement with the Ottomans. Most importantly, we know that Szepessy represented hundreds, if not thousands, of other Hungarian nobles who put their trust in the Ottomans. This became abundantly clear during the 1670 and 1672 pro-Ottoman revolts in which Szepessy played important leadership roles. Who were these nobles? And to what extent did they hold Szepessy's positive opinion about the Ottomans? We know that many of them shared Szepessy's concern with the survival of Protestant religion; in his meetings with Köprülü and other Ottoman dignitaries he was often accompanied by Lutheran and Calvinist nobles. However, Szepessy was also connected with a minority of Catholic nobles who were as outraged about the terror of the Habsburg army as he was. And, finally, there were others who cared less about religion and Habsburg violence than about the security of their estates after the Ottomans had effectively destroyed the Habsburg border defense system during the 1663–64 war. They were ready to pay tribute in return for safety. A prosopography of pro-Ottoman Hungarian nobles that would reflect the full spectrum of their thoughts and behaviors is called for. But it may

more balanced reassessment, see Pálffy, *Hungary between two Empires*, 218–28, esp. 223 (“Hungary's long-awaited liberation came at a high price”), 224 (“A liberation that brought so much devastation”).

⁹³ Izsák Schulhof, *Budai krónika 1686* (The Chronicle of Buda 1686). Translated from the Hebrew by László Jólesz (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1981). On the dehumanization of the “Turkish” Other (including the triumphant parading of decapitated heads as victory trophies in processions), see Herbert Karner, “Türkenköpfe als Mittel symbolischer Repräsentation,” in *Türkenkriege und Adelskultur in Ostmitteleuropa vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Robert Bern and Sabine Jagodzinski, vol. 14 of *Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia* (Leipzig: Jan Thorbecke, 2014), 317–29.

⁹⁴ Georg B. Michels, “Rebels and Turcophiles? The Hungarian Protestant Clergy's Resistance against the Habsburg Counter-Reformation,” *Austrian History Yearbook*, vol. 55 (2024): 1–24 (first view).

not be easily achieved since the evidence is widely dispersed and ego-documents (such as letters) are very rare. Pál Szepessy's story can be reconstructed only because he corresponded with a wide range of individuals; many of his letters appear to have been destroyed by later generations of his family (apparently unhappy about his affiliation with the Ottomans). But enough have survived in Transylvanian and Habsburg archives (largely thanks to their interception by spies).⁹⁵

The Hungarian nobility's actual encounters with the Ottomans also require much more scrutiny. Szepessy's first contacts were with courtiers of the pasha of Eger and he eventually became good friends with the kaymakam, a fellow Hungarian whom he visited frequently. It appears that Szepessy gradually built his relationships with Hungarian-Ottoman powerbrokers. By the end of the 1660s he had influential supporters in Varat and Buda. They allowed him to make connections at the Porte that enabled him to meet Grand Vizier Köprülü for the first time in July 1671. Unfortunately, we know much less about his supporters and promoters at the Porte. It is clear, however, that Szepessy had built a strong network of sympathizers who facilitated his long stays in Edirne. Among them must have been the growing number of courtiers who wanted to end the Polish-Ottoman war (1672–76) and turn the Ottoman army against Hungary. Again, Szepessy's success in forging a far-flung network of supporters in the Ottoman world may not be representative. What we do know about this network is largely due to Habsburg espionage: unlike other Hungarian nobles who also moved freely among the Ottomans, Szepessy was considered a high-value target. Spies followed him even into meetings with Grand Vizier Köprülü.⁹⁶

In sum, Szepessy's life offers a trans-imperial perspective on the complicated entanglements of the Hungarian borderlands with the Ottoman Empire. His beliefs and actions defy dominant historiographic assumptions about Hungarian Turcophobia, Ottoman decline, and the inevitable rise of the Habsburg Empire. For Szepessy none of these purported realities played a role. He did not share the widespread European view of the Ottomans as the "archenemies of Christendom" (*Erzfeinde der Christenheit*). And he certainly did not buy into the rhetoric of Hungary as the "Bulwark of Christendom" (*Antemurale Christianitatis*).⁹⁷ In fact, if anything, he hoped that the Ottomans

⁹⁵ For the destruction of Ottoman-Hungarian correspondence by later generations of noble families, see Hajnalka Tóth, "Die Beziehung der Familie Batthyány zur Osmanischen Elite im Ungarisch-Osmanischen Grenzgebiet von 16.-17. Jahrhundert," in *Türkenkriege und Adelskultur*, ed. Bern and Jagodzinski, 165–77, esp. 170.

⁹⁶ On the successes and failures of Habsburg intelligence at the Porte, see Georg M. Michels, "When Will the Turks Attack? Habsburg Espionage and Actionable Intelligence in the Age of Grand Vizir Ahmed Köprülü (1661–1676)," in *Seeing Muscovy Anew: Politics-Institutions-Culture. Essays in Honor of Nancy Shields Kollmann*, ed. Michael S. Flier, Valerie A. Kivelson, Erika Monahan, and Daniel Rowland (Bloomington, Ind.: Slavica Publishers, 2017), 303–21.

⁹⁷ On the dominant anti-Ottoman stereotypes of the period, see Martin Wrede, *Das Reich und seine Feinde. Politische Feindbilder in der Reichspatriotischen Publizistik zwischen Westfälischem Frieden und Siebenjährigem Krieg* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2004), 87–104, 114–24. My own research strongly contradicts Paula Fichtner's assumption that Central European societies uniformly

would provide a bulwark against the Habsburgs, who he believed had brought unbearable tyranny and suffering to Hungary. For Szepessy, the Ottomans were winning in the conflict of Central European empires. Contrary to the standard view of many historians, he did not believe that Hungary had to be liberated from the “Turkish yoke” by the Habsburgs. Rather, he believed the opposite: Hungary had to be liberated from the Habsburg yoke by the Ottomans. For him the future of Hungary was only conceivable as an Ottoman vassal state.

absorbed these Turcophobic and Islamophobic stereotypes. Cf. Paula Sutter Fichtner, *Terror and Toleration: The Habsburg Empire Confronts Islam, 1526–1850* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 12 (“Aristocrat, well-to-do burgher, artisan and peasant in the Habsburg lands all had some preformed ideas of the fearsome Turk and what to expect from him. They also had well-developed convictions of the worthlessness of Islam”).

Cite this article: Michels GB (2024). Turcophile, Religious Zealot, and Rebel: The Hungarian Noble Pál Szepessy’s Encounters with Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü (1661–76). *Review of Middle East Studies* 57, 43–72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2024.17>