

Chocim (Khotyn) 1621

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Poland and Turkey before the outbreak of the war

a) Some short characteristics of the opponents

Poland (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) ([map 1](#))

Territory – 1.1 million km²

Population – aprox. 10 million

Political system – a parliamentary monarchy, where the head of state was Sigismund III Vasa (born in 1566 AD; since 1587 the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania)



Turkey (the Ottoman Empire)

Territory – aprox. 6 mln km²

Population – aprox. 25 million

Political system – an absolute monarchy, where the head of state was the Sultan Osman II (born in 1603 AD; since 1618 the Sultan of Turkey)

Both countries were very powerful from the military point of view. Traditionally, Turkey had been viewed as a great empire, although at that time there were symptoms of its crisis.

In her eastern territories, Poland had just finished a formidable war with Russia (1609-1618 AD), taking with it, some 75,000 km² territory and its most important regional fortress of Smolensk. The title of Tsar of Russia remained in the Polish Prince's (Władysław Vasa) hands as well.

In the Polish west, in 1619 AD the Polish interference in the 30 Years War (the *Lisowczyks* excursion and subsequent defeat of the Hungarian army in the battle of *Humienne*) forced these Hungarian insurgents to pack up their siege of Vienna. While in their northern conflict, the Poles had been fighting the Swedes quite efficiently.

A chain of victorious battles with more numerous enemies, representing both eastern and western military arts showed that the Polish army definitely led the way in the whole central, eastern and northern regions of Europe, with regard to their achievements and advances in military sciences.

b) Polish – Turkish relations before the outbreak of the war and the genesis of the conflict

Poland and Turkey were attempting to be on good and friendly relations for the whole of the 16th c. and the beginning of the 17th c. Turkey did not see Poland as its main enemy. It preferred not to involve itself into a war with the neighboring country, as it was busy with the wars with Persia (in Asia) and in Europe with the Habsburgs. It was similar with Poland – in the east it was involved in wars with Russia and at the beginning of the 17th c. also in a war in the north (with the Swedes). So Poland wanted to avoid altogether, a third front. In the 16th c. Poland and Turkey made and signed treaties of friendship. These were also repeated in the beginning of 17th c. However, there were fretful if not alarming, issues between the two countries, which finally led to a war.

The first source of conflict was the issue of mutual plundering organized and conducted by both subjects of the Turkish Sultan and the Polish King ([map 2](#)).

On one hand, the Tatars had reached, with their cavalry raids, several hundreds of kilometers deep inside the Commonwealth territories to plunder and capture slaves - *jassir*. Those incursions were very harmful to the south-eastern Polish economy and they hampered the colonization of wilder and lesser-populated Ukrainian lands. On the other hand, navy excursions of the Cossacks alarmed with apprehension, the Sultan's subjects all over the Black Sea coasts.



[Map 2](#)

It was very harmful to the Ottoman Empires' prestige, particularly, because they reached into the close neighborhood of the very heart of the Turkish capital itself, and plundered it.

Several thousand, or, over several tens-of-thousands of people took part in the Tartar raids on Poland and the Cossacks raids on the Ottoman nations. Of course, both countries prevented those incursions. Polish and Turkish envoy legations were sent to each other. Both of them, however, blamed their "*insubordinate*" subjects and officially washed their hands of the issue, assuring their neighbor of their mutual good will, and that they would do anything to prevent the *rogue elements* of each other's nations from the invading their respective subjects.

The second source of the conflict was the issue of Moldavia. The territory of which, that country, formally dependant on Turkey, was for Poland, a buffer zone, which was to protect southern Poland from any potential direct danger emanating from the Ottoman Empire. For a quite some time there was an agreement between Poland and Turkey, on behalf of which, a sultan endowed the title of '*hospodar*' (i.e., regional governor or ruler) of Moldavia, to a candidate endorsed or pointed out by the Polish king. The whole time of that agreement though, Poland and Turkey were trying to deprive, and therefore, undermine the respective efforts of that neighbor, of their influence from that country and take a full control of it.

The final problem provoking the breach of relationship between Turkey and Poland was both countries' attitude towards the Hapsburgs. Turkey, a traditional enemy of the Austrian Emperor, was observing with growing anxiety, the progress of the securing and reinforcing of the Polish-Austrian alignment.

Within a few years of the prelude to the outbreak of the war, in both delicate areas, a visible aggravation of Polish activity occurred. Cossacks sea escapades achieved an unbelievable heightened scale. The Cossacks' flotillas were destroying Turkish fleets, plundering Turkish coastal towns and cities, and once again, causing consternation, in 1620 they attacked the very vicinity of the capital, Istanbul. The Polish interference in the Thirty Years' War and the Polish army escapades and incursions into Moldavia were also perceived inconveniently and alarming. This increase of tensions led to Turkish military demonstrations both in 1617 and 1618. Polish and Turkish armies now faced each other. More importantly, armed conflicts took place as well, but at that time, newly signed treaties prevented the demonstrations from turning into the open and full scale war.

In 1620 there occurred the next Polish escapade into Moldavia, which ended as the major military disaster in the history of 17th Century Poland. Some 3,000-3,100 soldiers came back from Moldavia, which is about 30% of the total of the army that had gone on this campaign. As the effect of this ill-fated escapade, a lot of the Polish '*Quarter Army*' was destroyed; the Grand Crown Hetman was killed and the Field Crown Hetman was taken in the Turkish captivity. In Turkey, those events were interpreted as a potential sign of Polish weakness. Despite that, a war with Poland was not very popular amongst Turkish society. The French ambassador received information from the Turkish capital, that in order to avoid the outbreak of the war with Poland, the wealthy Turkish elites were ready to pay for all the military costs incurred and to compensate for the destruction that the plundering Cossacks had already caused. Even Vizier Ali Pasha dissuaded the Sultan from attacking Poland. But young Osman II, dreaming of equal military fame and achievements, as his predecessor, Suleiman the Great, preferred to listen these advisers, who encouraged him to prepare for war.

On the other hand, Polish society, growing tired of 20 years of constant wars on all other fronts, did not show even the slightest enthusiasm or support for the a with Turkey as well. The king, hetman, and Cossacks were blamed for provoking the war. Diplomatic action which occurred after the Moldavian escapade did not bring any desirable effect. Turkey was preparing herself for the coming war with Poland with a great verve and energy...

The Opponents' Forces

Turkey

For a long period of time, the numbers of the Turkish army of Chocim had been overestimated. Polish, Ukrainian and Russian 20th cent. historians, basing on the *Szemberg* report, spoke of 160,000 Turkish soldiers and 60,000 Tatars. Polish diaries written by the participants who took part in the battle, very often spoke of 300,000 Turks and 100,000 Tatars, quoting the data coming from Turkey. In turn, fugitives from the Turkish camp estimated 30,000 Sipahis, 20,000 Janissary soldiers and 100,000 general populace. 60,000 Tatars were alleged to have joined.

How large was the Turkish army of Chocim? Paradoxically, each of the sources gave the right number, but not of the Turkish army. An explanation of that paradox was found in *"The Diary of the Turkish War in Wallachia"* by *Jan Ostroróg*. In the beginning of his diary he says, as did many Polish participants of that campaign, that:

"The Turkish Emperor came with 300,000 soldiers, apart from Tatars [...]."

In the end of his diary he specifies that number:

"[...] including the Tatars, there were more than 400,000 Turkish soldiers."

Along with *Żeleński*, who was a political envoy to the Turks, it was said:

"That [Żeleński] hearing and seeing the Turks and Tatars, claimed that there were over 150,000 Turks and over 60,000 Tatars. [...] And the reason for that small number was that he counted them in a Polish way, which differs from the Turkish one, because in the Turkish army they count each living creature separately, so when a knight is sitting on his horse and has got another horse, a mule or a camel, then it is all counted separately and that is why there was such a great number of everything [...]."

That method of counting the number of army was also proved by *Krzysztof Zbaraski*, who, after that war, was an envoy to Turkey and left behind, some interesting and notable points about the Turkish military structure from those times. What is even more interesting, the Turks did not use that method to count their losses, they used it just to count the amount of their army. *Ostroróg* comments a further argument:

"[...] that's why when there are 10,000 Polish soldiers, there'll be more soldiers than counting 20,000 or even 30,000 of Turks."

It is noteworthy to the reader, exactly for what that method of counting the army's numbers actually served. It would be most logical to plausibly consider it as a psychological effect that they wanted to achieve. When the Turks marched on their enemy they carefully sent ahead the rumor about their huge numbers and size of their army. Truly, it must have had a paralyzing and further, a demoralizing effect on their enemies' soldiers while, conversely, having a very highly motivating effect on the ranks of their own soldiers. In the times, when the biggest European field armies counted much less than 100,000 soldiers, 400,000 Turks and Tatars must have had an immensely shocking effect overall to eyewitness's. Obviously there is one more possibility regarding the system employed to the method of counting the numbers of the Turkish soldiers. Perhaps when counting the army, they summed up both animals and people together for the purpose of better logistics.

Knowing the specifics of the Turkish methods of counting the army, we can now interpret the sources correctly. It appears that all of them now appear to match with each others' estimates. When the diarists write about a 300,000-man army, when quoting the Turkish data, it was in reality, the total number of *all* the people *and* animals in the Turkish army. When they write about a 150,000 – 160,000-man army, this reference was *only* the number of people in the Turkish army. It should be also underlined that the number of soldiers was not *equal* with the total number of *all* the people in the camp. Also an item to take into consideration, apart from, but in addition to, the soldiers, in every army, there then, were also the uncounted-for multitudes of servants. That is why, the number of actual Turkish *combatants* needs to be realistically reduced. How much?

At present, the Polish historians' approach was that the Turkish soldiers' method of counting utilizing different data, was notably variant than was our method above. *Leszek Podhorodecki's* counting basis example is shown below...

Basing on the relation of a captured Turk and the relation of *Naima*, L. Podhorodecki quantifies the Turkish provinces, which were sending their soldiers to the war. The numerical amount of the army from those provinces L. Podhorodecki describes on the data established by *Paul Rycaut* (1629-1700), who was the leading authority of his day on the Ottoman Empire. The second source for the knowledge of the numerical military forces of the individual provinces is "*The Description of the Turkish monarchy in the Times of Ahmed I*" by *Ayn Ali*.

"*The description of the monarchy...*" gives the reader, news which are of a few years prior, than the time of the Chocim battle, in which we are interested in this work. The data from both of the sources are quite compatible, so we can also readily accept, it *also* for the year 1621. On that basis, L.P. claims that into the battle of Chocim, went approximately:

- 14,000 soldiers from Anatolia, under beylerbey Hassan, commanding

- 18,000 soldiers from Rumelia, under beylerbey Yusuf Pasha, commanding
- 2,000 soldiers from Aleppo, under Tayyar bey, commanding
- 1,400 soldiers from Diyarbekir, under Dilawer pasha, commanding
- 5,000-6,000 soldiers from Bosnia, under Hussein Pasha, commanding
- Over 1,000 soldiers from Tripoli
- 6,000 soldiers from Sivas
- 4,000 soldiers from Karaman
- 1,000 soldiers from Maraş, under Abazy Pasha, commanding
- 2,500 soldiers from Kaffa (Feodosiya)
- 1,000 volunteers from Dobruja
- 2,000-3,000 soldiers from Rakka (Ar-Raqqah)
- Reserves comprised of 5,000 nomads and guards of various Turkish dignitaries
- 4,000 soldiers from Buda (Budin) under Qaraqash Mehmed Pasha, commanding (they arrived *during* the Chocim battle)

So we are looking at an approximate total of about 68,000 actual combatants altogether. That number also includes the fact that not all the vassals from individual provinces could go to war (because of diseases and empty vacancies). A theoretical number should actually have been a few percents higher give or take¹. What needs to be explained here is that armies from those provinces were, in fact, a *common levy* of the vassals who were obliged to serve in the army. The number of 68,000, should be *lowered* because of the marching losses and the desertion rate. L. Podhorodecki estimates that about 50,000-55,000 soldiers could have realistically managed to get to Chocim from those provinces.

Apart from the common levy from the individual lands, the Turks had also regular soldier regiments – *kapikulu ortas*. Among them, there were janissaries and sipahis. The number of janissaries the sultan set off with was estimated by L.P. to 18, 000 (according to *De Cesy* and *Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki*). However, he says that only about 12,000 janissaries managed to get to Chocim because of marching losses and desertion rates.

Ottoman sources seem to confirm a huge scale of desertion among janissaries. According to Turkish historian *Kadir Kasalak*:

"The Janissaries and Timarli Sipahi received an order to finish their preparations as soon as possible and to get together on the fields of Dawut Pasha near to Istambul. [...] According to the orders, the Janissaries were leaving their homes saying that they were going to Istambul, but after spending a few days near Istambul, they returned home claiming that they were released from war - it was a certain escape from the campaign."

¹ Actually these numbers might be even 1 / 3 higher. Podhorodecki doesn't seem to notice Ricaut's point: "but this is calculated at the lowest rate, they may very well be reckoned to be one third more"

By the end of August the Sultan came across some rumors and gossip that even half of the Janissaries were missing. He ordered a muster, which:

"Convinced [the Sultan] that the gossips were right, and the Janissaries commanders were reprimanded." (Naima effendi)

Sipahis of the sultan guard were leaving the capital their number was 12,000 soldiers, but only 8,000 managed to get to Chocim. Leszek Podchorodecki adds to those armies also the attendance of the Turkish artillery who numbered in several hundred members and a Moldavian army under *Stefan Tomşa* commanding, (5,000 soldiers) as well as a Wallachian army under *Radu Mihnea* commanding (according to Leszek Podchorodecki – 7,000 soldiers; according to *Kadir Kasalak* – 6,000 soldiers).

All together 110,000 Turks were to set off to Chocim, but only 82,000 – 87,000 managed to arrive to the battle, because of the marching losses. So the remaining balance (some 70,000 – 80,000 people) were servants.

Apart from the Turkish army, there is a also separate position for the Tatar army. As usually in such cases, Polish reports overestimate their number and give the number of 60,000 to 100,000. But the khan informed the Sultan, that he had 'only' 50,000 men. This would consist, most certainly, of the number of Tartar warriors and their (worse armed) servants.

So, the combined forces of the Ottoman Empire numbered over 100,000 soldiers and warriors (some 200,000 armed men) in the battle of Chocim. Those armies brought with them 62 cannon, including 15 heavy siege cannons.

Poland

Now, we look at the Polish Army, who was mobilized to that war. The army consisted of a few components:

1. Enlisted armies
2. The Cossacks
3. Private armies of the magnates and the common levy

As far as enlisted armies are concerned, the Commonwealth mobilized about 30,000 paid soldiers in the second half of 1621. Not all of them fought in the battle of Chocim. From the given number, about 1,670 portions (the number is given for first days of September, 1621) stayed in Lithuania and Livonia to fight off Gustav Adolf who, using Polish involvement in the south, attacked the Commonwealth from the north with 18,000 soldiers. The next 3,000 Polish portions were cast, castles, cities and towns in the south of Poland.

In the battle of Chocim there were:

- 53 units of hussars (8,520 portions all together)

- 66 units of Polish light cavalry (Cossacks) and Lisowczyks (8,450 portions)
- 10 units of reiters (2,160 portions)
- 5 regiments of German infantry (6,450 portions)
- 29 units of Polish infantry (7,600 portions)

All together, the *'on paper'* strength of the Polish army was 33,180 portions.

However, the *'on paper'* strength of the Polish army is not the same as the number of its soldiers. The fact which diminished the actual number of soldiers was the method of payment to the officers from *"blind portions"*. To count the actual number of soldiers in the unit you have to deduct 10% (*because this is the percentage devoted to the officers' payment*) from its theoretical amount (*that is, from the number of "portions" of the individual unit*). This method was used with the entire Polish cavalry and the German infantry. It was different however, with the Polish infantry, where the officers were paid the other way, which meant that the number of combatants of the Polish infantry unit was equal to the number of soldiers of that unit.

So, the number of enlisted soldiers who were directed to the Chocim camp was not 33,180 but rather 30,622. However, we should take into consideration that not all of them reached the camp. So, from the number given here we need to deduct the marching losses (desertion, diseases, etc.). Surely, the losses were smaller from the Turkish ones, because the Polish units had a shorter distance to go than the Turkish units. The marching losses of the Polish army can be estimated of about 10% of the soldiers.

Finally, in the Polish camp in Chocim there were about 27,000 enlisted soldiers of the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, as it was in the Turkish army and any other European army then, that number of soldiers was increased by many armed servants, which could take part in the defense of the camp as well as the other military actions, although the servants were not included in the number of soldiers. As far as the infantry is concerned, the number of servants was minimal, but in the Polish cavalry there were 2 – 3 servants to one soldier average, which means that taking into consideration the marching losses, there were 30,000 – 45,000 additional armed people who could be used in the emergency actions.

Apart from the enlisted armies, the Ukrainian Zaporozhian Cossacks took part in the battle of Chocim. Cossacks (Kozacy) were a people living in south-east of Kingdom of Poland (nowadays it is the territory of Ukraine), who, due to their multi-ethnic diversity, we cannot unequivocally include to any ethnic group. They stepped out of any established social division. They were neither peasants, nobility, nor citizens, although they came from any and all of those social groups. It is also very difficult to name their nationality, but undoubtedly, most of them were of the then-Ruthenian nation. As to their theology, the Cossacks were not mono religious. It was a real social and religious melting pot. The foundational element of attraction

to the Cossacks was their way of living and the feeling of social individuality. They were free (in contrary to the average peasants); they made their living from steppe and rapacious rendering. That element of their lives – plundering – and fighting against Tatars, created a somewhat romanticized view of “*a warrior of the steppe*”. Yet, the Cossacks were still the subjects of the Polish king. Some of them were given a pay standard by Poland, creating a so-called ‘*register*’ army. In 1621 there were 3,000 Cossacks in the register army. However, it was only a small percentage of those Cossacks who took part in the campaign of 1621. Confronting the Turkish danger, the Polish king appealed to the Cossacks to join the defense of the common fatherland. The appeal was supported by the authority of the orthodox priesthood and as a result, Cossacks took part in the war by the masses. Their number was over 40,000 people, but not all of them fought at Chocim. Some of them were fighting against the Turks on the sea; the others died during the Cossacks hostilities in Moldavia which preceded the battle of Chocim. Some of the Cossacks remained in the *Sich* (*Sich* – the Cossacks fortified stronghold) creating their garrison, and finally, some of them should be counted out on the losses during the long marches.

It is estimated that in the battle of Chocim 30,000 Cossacks were fighting, whereas the number of servants in the Cossack armies was insignificant, as the Cossacks took the servants’ responsibilities, as was likewise found in the Polish infantry.

The next component of the Polish army mobilized in 1621 was the private armies (including the royal guard) and the ‘*common levy*’ (levy of the landholders). However, those armies did not take part in the battle, rather, they became a strategic rearguard (those armies were situated near Lviv) for the army fighting in the battle of Chocim, and they protected the interior of the country from the Tatar invasion. According to Leszek Podhorodecki and *Jan Wimmer*, there were 28,000 soldiers of private armies and the Levy all together (the data for October, 1621). The bulk of them were cavalrymen, so they had a numerous train of armed servants. *Auxent* – a Polish translator who accompanied Polish army at Chocim – noticed in his chronicle:

"1621, in the month of September His Majesty the King Sigismund III came with 40.000 men to Lviv, to hasten to the aid of his son against the infidel. And there were twice 100.000 men with him."

In 1621, the Commonwealth mobilized about 100,000 soldiers all together, whereas about 57,000 soldiers were fighting, directly engaged in the battle of Chocim and about 30,000–45,000 servants supported them. So, the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack army was, numerically, twice as small than that of the Turkish-Tatar army in the battle of Chocim.

Over 160,000 soldiers were fighting on both sides in the battle of Chocim (soldiers and servants – some 300,000), at that time, which was truly a unique number of combatants. Perhaps it is enough to say that the biggest battle of the TYW engaged less than 80,000 soldiers of both sides.

The Battlefield and the Enemies' Positions

The battlefield was situated in the fields close to Chocim castle where the Commonwealth army laid their fortified camp out ([pic. 1](#), [map 3](#), [panorama 3](#), [panorama 2](#), [panorama 1](#)).



[Pic. 1](#) A plan of the battle of Chocim. (engraved by J.Lauro)



[Map 3](#)



[Panorama 3](#)



[Panorama 2](#)



[Panorama 1](#)

The Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack army camp was laid out to the west on the Dniester River, and Polish territory was behind that. The place itself, where the battle took place, belonged actually, to Moldavia.

That choice of the battlefield by the Polish commanders was due to two circumstances. Crossing that boundary of the Dniester River and laying their camps out on the Moldavia territory, Polish commanders showed their determination to fight. It was a kind of demonstration towards the Cossacks who were afraid, that in front of the enemy, hetman Chodkiewicz and the commissioners could attempt to make a peace agreement with the Turks, at the cost of the Cossacks (we should remember that Turkey demanded from Poland to stop the Cossack plundering invasions and even requested Cossack extermination).

Entering regular armies on the Moldavian territory was then a signal for the Cossacks that *'we are here to fight and not to negotiate'*.

The second circumstance which was taken into consideration while laying the camp out on the Moldavian side of the Dniester River was that, in that way, they were to fight the Turks and the Tatars on the border, which was to avoid and prevent plundering of the Polish territory.

The Polish armies' positions were protected by an escarpment from the north ([pic2](#)) and by the Dniester River and a rocky slope from the east ([pic3](#)).



[Pic. 2](#)

An access to the Polish camp was quite easy from the south (it is where the Cossack camp was laid out) and from the west, where the Polish armies strengthened their defense by building

ramparts during the battle and additional earthworks protruding from the fortification line of the main camp.



Pic. 3

The main Polish camp was surrounded by a high rampart which was 7 km long, in front of which, a deep trench was dug. Two gates (Chodkiewicz's and Lubomirski's) were made in that rampart and they were used by the Polish armies when they led their soldiers to the battle in the foreground of their camp.

The condition of the Cossacks' camp was not so well fortified. They came to the battlefield just a day before the Turks, and therefore, resulting in that they did not have as much time as the Poles and the Lithuanians had had, to build more solid fortifications. Initially, the Cossack positions were protected only by two lines of wagons, filled with sand and a trench.

The Commonwealth camp however, was soon surrounded by the arriving Turkish armies.

The Sultan occupied a special position on a high hill ([panorama 1](#)). Even the Poles, who loved wealth and splendor themselves and whose tents were admired by German mercenary soldiers, were impressed by the Sultan's tent and encampment.

Not only was the tent admired but also the exotic animals used to transport it, of which there were four elephants.

The location where the Sultan's tents were pitched is worth mentioning also for another reason; The Sultan observed the battle from there, he interrogated his prisoners there and they were executed there – in the presence of the Sultan and on his command.

Auxent wrote:

"I saw the spot where the Emperor had been sitting and watching the events during the battle and during the attacks. This spot was on the top of a high hill and was called Horodiszczce. The infidel Tartars had captured servants as they went unsuspecting to collect wood or hay in the vicinity of the camp. They brought the servants before the Emperor to serve him for source of information and that they were well-known people. The infidel Emperor questioned the captives and made them to be interrogated and ordered their throats to be cut in his presence and the killed men to be thrown down from the high hill. It was the same case with those who had fled from the Polish camp and surrendered to the infidel, they had also been interrogated and then slayed. And if anybody had wanted to abscond from their [the Turks'] camp to the

Polish camp, he had also been beheaded and thrown down the hill, just as the captives they seized. Then we saw these killed men, whose heads had rolled far away from the hill down to the valley, and their trunks lay there at the foot of the hill like pieces of log, in 2 – 3 places. At one place there were more than a hundred [dead] men lying, at the second spot more than 300, and likewise at the third spot. So the infidel Turks exercised ruthless tyranny, they had not fed a single captive and had left none of them alive. Our Polish nation on the other hand had not killed any of those that they had captured alive, but had taken them to Poland.”

Both Polish and Turkish forces had built bridges over the Dniester River for which purposes, was to let the Poles communicate with their own territory and the Turks – to surround the Commonwealth armies completely.



Pic. 4 – Polish bridge and its construction

incursions of cavalry raids deep into Polish territory. However, some units of the Polish army reserves that had been left to defend the country would eventually take care of them.

The same day, the Turks, after serious artillery preparation (bombardment), attacked the Cossack camp with all their might and power. The Cossacks, again supported by the Lisowczyks, the infantry, reiters and the volunteers from other Polish-Lithuanian *banners* (banners – units of Polish cavalry) repulsed four attacks, one by one. After the last Turkish assault, by sunset, the Cossacks launched their own vicious counterattack. It was quite effective at first. They penetrated the Turkish camp, but instead of routing those running away and demoralized Turks, distracted by war booty, they started plundering the Turkish tents. Seizing advantage of that moment, the Sultan's soldiers rallied and ousted the Cossacks from their own camp.

September 5 – Some events which troubled the Commonwealth camp had taken place that day. They were:

"By the Chocim castle, in the ravine there were about 100 merchants [Moldavian], where our servants and other people were drinking, buying supplies either for money or for pledge."

There were men, women and children among them. Those people, trusting Polish assurances that they were safe, were attacked by the camp rabble with such an atrocity, who broadcast that it was an order of hetman Chodkiewicz. Innocent people were accused of planning to burn Polish-Lithuanian camp. The real reason for attacking those people was to plunder them without punishment, because Chodkiewicz did not give any order. In order not to leave any witness's of the anarchy, the victims were brutally murdered:

"Tens were thrown from the bridge [...], women and children were not saved and even they had their arms and legs tied when thrown into the river, they did not drown quickly; they could swim anyway, so to kill them the rabble had to hit and shoot them with their muskets; the other were thrown from the high castle bridge."

The guards were sent to catch the rabble, whom they captured and subsequently hanged for the atrocity.

September 6 – 7 – The Turks began to prepare themselves for a regular siege; they moved their camp and dug trenches around it. They also kept firing at the Polish camp. The last units of prince Władysław's contingent arrived finally, at the Polish camp.

The night of, September 6 – 7, the Cossacks made a sally against the Tatars, causing large losses to the Tatars. The Cossacks were not repulsed until a Turkish relief force had arrived,

September 7 – It was the day of the final battle culmination. Up until the afternoon, the Turkish armies attacked the Cossack camp four times. Those assaults lasted five hours, including the time of an artillery bombardment. All of them were repulsed by the Cossacks. Changing their tactics, the Turks, in the afternoon, seeing that their attacks on the Cossack camp did not bring any measurable success, they decided to change the direction of the attack. So they attacked the junction point line, between the Polish and the Lithuanian armies, which had not been bothered till that time. Asleep on the earthworks in that place, were two infantry units (*Życzewski's* and *Śladkowski's*). The astonished and surprised infantry soldiers offered no serious opposition. Both units' commanders and about 100 soldiers died. The Turks, under command of *Mustafa* (Pasha of Baghdad), personally climbed the ramparts where the battle flared up. Some plundering the area also took place.

The Sultan's armies, however, had not taken full advantage of that success. The Polish cavalry soundly counterattacked and repulsed the Turks, who having a lot of booty, did not show any interest in carrying any further in the fighting. Arriving back to their own camp with a triumph, the Turkish soldiers informed the Sultan where the weakest point in the Polish defense was. They decided to attack that place again the same day. And so took place and happened by the falling of dusk.

The events, which took place in the dusky evening of September 7, gave rise to a legend of the Polish hussars being the invincible cavalry. Auxent in his chronicle described this event in this way:

"On Tuesday, the same day, after the infidel Turks had put their ranks in order, at 23 o'clock, 15.000 men again drew up on the field and with a great force and great rapidity went straight against the gate of the Polish camp, where the Field-Hetman was staying, as there were 2 gates on the Turkish side. At the other gate there stood the Crown-Hetman. There were stationed 3 rotas [companies] as day sentries at the gate of the Crown-Hetman, and they did not suspect anything. But seeing that the infidel went straight against the gate of the Field-Hetman, the Crown-Hetman instantly started out on horseback against them. Then the 3 rotas having seen the great zeal of the Hetman, did not let him go into fight. But in front castellan of Połock [Mikołaj Zenowicz] and Prokop Sieniawski attacked the enemy with their banners [companies], and so did also the Crown-Hetman's third banner which had been stationed there as reserve. Calling on God's help the 300 men engaged in fight, so that the lance of none was left empty, because with firm hands they encountered one another, straight from the side of the field and not frontally, and each knocked down 2 – 3 men, because there was such a throng. Then they drew out their pallsches [swords] and killed as many as they wished. When

the infidel [Turks] saw this, they took to flight and trampled down each other. And our men pursued them hitting and killing them as far as the camp of the Turks. But a spear was hurled at pan [sir] Połocki [castellan of Połock Mikołaj Zenowicz], who galloped in front of the rotas, and it hit the brim of his helmet, so that it slipped sideways and hurt his head, but he did not fall off the horse, but still killed some men. At the same time 2 comrades and 11 retainers of our men were killed. Moreover the standard of the Crown-Hetman was captured by the infidel Turks. 5 days later pan Połocki [castellan of Połock Mikołaj Zenowicz] gave back his soul to God, he died a hero's death, and so he was deeply bewailed by all the army. As from among the Turks there had been killed some 1.200 man, more or less. At night the Turks came with torches and nighlamps and searching among the corpses of the dead, they took those, who were distinguished. They left the others on the spot as dogs. But they cut down their heads, took them to the Polish earthworks and threw them over, and our people buried them. And so the infidel Turks departed not in good spirit. The infidel Mustafa, pasha of Baghdad, who had arrived in the morning, could not gain a victory till nightfall."

In fact there are some errors in this description. According to what the Turks were describing after the battle, 10,000 soldiers (including a couple thousand of Turkish cavalry) was the number of forces which were sent by the Sultan against the Polish-Lithuanian camp.

Chodkiewicz (the Grand hetman of Lithuania) decided to face the enemy in an open battlefield. He took from the camp 6 units of the Polish-Lithuanian cavalry. Four banners (600 soldiers) were formed in an array, which attacked the Turks ([map 4](#)). Under command of *Stanisław Lubomirski*, the rest of the cavalry was held in reserve. They did not take part in the fight.

Routing over 15 times the size of their enemies, the hussar charge was led by Chodkiewicz personally. Polish diaries note (taking from the Turks as the source of information) that seeing such shocking disaster befall the Turkish forces, Sultan himself cried.



[Map 4](#)

However, the falling of dusk prevented the Poles from pressing the advantage of the entire victory. About 500 Turks died on the battlefield, but the rest of the Turkish army hid in their own camp. Remarkably, the Poles only lost in that attack 1 rotmistrz (Castellan of Połock, *Mikołaj Zenowicz*), 22 comrades and 11 retainers.

September 8 – 10 – Encouraged by the success of September 7, Chodkiewicz boldly marched the Polish-Lithuanian armies out in front of the camp, attempting to provoke the Turks into fighting in the battlefield, but all in vain. However, as a Polish participant in the battle wrote:

"The enemy seeing that the case with the hussars was a lot more different than he had expected [...], he [the Sultan] sent all his forces against the Cossacks"

In fact, on those days that the Turks were less active on the battlefield, they directed their actions only towards the Cossacks. On **September 8**, they attacked the Cossacks' camp three times.

The next day only one attack was held. On the **10th of September** there was no action.

The Osman command changed the tactics. Until that time they were trying to break the Polish-Lithuanian defense through direct attacks. Those attacks only resulted in too many losses which lowered the morale of their own soldiers. Now they decided to force the armies of the Commonwealth to capitulate, shooting at the defenders and cutting off the roads and routes to food and forage supplies. In order to do that, they built a bridge over the Dniester River (they began to build the bridge on the **4th of September**), which a part of Turkish army crossed to support the Tatars who were already operating on the east side of the river. The war of exhaustion now began.

September 10 - *"Then also our horses started to die, some of hunger, [some] of 'the air' [plague], so our soldiers [hussars] had to go on foot right after the banner, wielding lances."*
(An anonymous Polish soldier)

September 11 – Chodkiewicz suddenly became very seriously ill. This was going to be the first sign of his coming death. However, he took the Polish-Lithuanian army out again, hoping to fight in an open field. This action elicited no response from the Turks who concentrated on shooting at the Cossack army that day. Skirmishes took place on the side of the Dniester River as well, where some units of Ottoman artillery had crossed the brand new bridge and where a few thousand of Tatars attacked the bridge from the Polish side of the Dniester. Two hundred infantry were protecting the bridge from this side. When one of the attacking Tatars was killed and two others were wounded (by musket balls) *'immediately the Tatars went away'*.

The night of September 11 – 12: Seeing the now-passive behavior of the Sultan's soldiers, Polish commanders decided to take the battle to the Turks themselves and attack the Turkish camp, taking with them, the enlisted infantry and the Cossacks from the camp to carry out their plan. Additionally, the Polish cavalry was taken, of which, a smaller segment was to initiate the attack, and the larger units were to wait in the rear-ground and cover the fighting infantry. Fortunately for the Turks, when the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack armies approached the Muslim camp, it started to rain heavily. A retreat was then ordered due to the downpour of rain, which resulted in wetting and rendering ineffective, the gunpowder of the Poles and Cossacks. The nightly attempt was not discovered by the Turks, so, continuing the element of

surprise, the Poles decided to repeat the whole action the following night. But the betrayal of a few mercenary infantry from Hungary who escaped to the Turkish camp resulted in letting the Turks know about Polish plans obviously making the whole action impossible.

September 12 – Despite his growing illness, Chodkiewicz bravely mounted his horse and once again, tried to provoke the Turks into a fight in the open battlefield once more. And, repeatedly, this time it did not work. The Turks only fired upon those Polish soldiers who caused them retreat to their own camp. The Cossack camp meanwhile, found itself attacked repeatedly that day. It is said that the Sultan's artillery fired upon the Cossacks 2,000 times, however, this resulted in losses of no great consequence. Additionally, it was noted that day that the angry Sultan exchanged the commander of the Janissaries (so called '*aga*'), with *Ali* becoming a new *aga* in command.

September 13 –14 – No significant action of note on both sides.

September 14 – Pasha *Qaraqash Mehmed* arrived at the Turkish camp with 4,000 Sipahis. At his urging, the Turkish armies went into battle the following day.

September 15 – The next attempt by the Turks was to try to gain an advantage by taking the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack camp by force. The ground attack was preceded by a heavy artillery bombardment on the Polish and Cossack camps. In the afternoon, *Qaraqash* attacked the ramparts of the Polish camp. The direction of the Turkish attack was pointed to and advised by one of the deserters from the Polish infantry (a Hungarian *hayduk*), who assured the Turks that this location was not well protected.

Nearly twenty-thousand Turkish soldiers comprising of 4,000 soldiers of *Qaraqash*, 6,000 Janissaries, 12,000 Rumelian Sipahis, and 5,000 Anatolian Sipahis were thrown into the attack, with (oddly enough) the majority of them dismounted.

At first, *Qaraqash's* armies were succeeding. Passing by well fortified *Weyher's* earthworks, they attacked that place pointed out by the traitor, which was protected by only one Polish infantry unit. Polish defense at that moment broke down, as Osman's soldiers moved further, swarming into the Polish camp.

Fortunately, the ever-efficient Poles managed to launch a massive counterattack against them. Prince *Władysław's* guards, the Polish cavalry from the camp and armed servants all taking part in the repulsion of the Turkish incursion. What helped the Poles, was the fact that Vizier Hussein Pasha did not direct and support the main attack on Polish forces in another camp location, as it had been previously agreed to before the attack... he did it purposely, due to of his hatred for *Qaraqash*.

Lubomirski's and Weyher's Polish infantry, were furiously protecting the earthworks in front of the main rampart, being attacked by the Turks who were then effectively repulsed from the Polish camp. It was at that moment, when a musket bullet reached and found the bravely fighting Qaraqash's heart. Seeing the demoralizing loss of their commander weakened the Turkish eagerness to press the fight. They retreated in disorder, helter-skelter back to their own camp. The consequence of this unsuccessful attack was the Sultan's dismissal of Vizier Hussein Pasha, with *Dilawer* Pasha becoming the newly appointed Vizier. There was also a secondary consequence of the ill-fated attack... According to Auxent:

"After the attack, they [Turks] immediately beheaded the hayduk, saying that 'you led us to such a disastrous place, that we were lost'."

September 16 – In the late evening, 1,300 Cossack people and 300 Polish infantry forded the Dniester River and boldly attacked the Turkish unit from the east (about 2,000 soldiers), who were protecting their bridge. After the dispersion of that Turkish unit and taking many war trophies, the soldiers returned triumphantly to their camp.

September 17– No further action from both of the sides. Only *Kantemir's* Tartar forces were successfully blocking supplies from reaching the Polish soldiers, intercepting one transport of food and a second one (with 100 wagons) forcing it to retreat.

September 18 - 19 – During the night, 4,000 Cossacks replied by attacking Sivas' and Karamans' Tatar camps. After plundering their camps and seeing Rumelian soldiers ready to fight, the Cossacks returned to their own camp with plentiful trophies.

The night of September 19 - 20, - A few hundred Cossacks made the following sally to the Turkish camp. Following that, the next were Lisowczyks. Both of these sallies were very successful, resulting in the capture of war trophies and much-needed food.

September 20 – The Sultan temporarily leaves the Turkish camp venturing to the location of Prut to meet with *Halil* Pasha.

September 21 – No further action from both of the sides

September 22 – the Turks relocate their cavalry, troops, and 30 cannon to the east side of the Dniester River.

The night of September 22 – 23, In a daring raid, the Cossacks again attacked Turkish soldiers protecting their bridge. The Turks were surprised again and they suffered losing a substantial number of their troops. And again, coming away with high morale and numerous war trophies the Cossacks returned triumphantly to their camp.

September 23 – The Cossacks, after preparing new ramparts inside their camp and destroying old ones, now moved to new positions which shortened yet strengthened the gaps in their defense line. This was necessary due to losses which they had up to that point. Following in kind, the Poles also shortened the lines of their ramparts, destroying Weyher's earthworks in the process. In an effort to not lose the morale of the Polish army, Chodkiewicz, now lying on his bed, dying, in a private war council, turns the command of the entire army over to Stanisław Lubomirski.

September 24 – Beloved commander, Hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz dies in the Chocim castle (pic. 6, 7). This news was at first concealed from the soldiers, so as not to weaken their fighting spirit. The news about Chodkiewicz' death came however, to the Turks.



Pic. 6 – Chocim castle

September 25 – Now counting on a weakened morale of Christians after losing their charismatic leader, the Turks conducted another attack. Following substantial artillery and musket fire, they attacked the Lisowczyks camp. Additionally, minor attacks were directed towards the Lithuanian camp. After hard fighting, the Turks were eventually repulsed during the vicious combat, but although the news of Chodkiewicz's death ultimately reached the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack soldiers, to the surprise of the Turks, it did not produce the expected reaction.



Pic. 7 – Chocim castle

September 26 – 27 - No significant action from both sides.

September 27 – The falling of the first winter snows.

September 28 – 29 – Finds the Sultan sending a raiding force deep into the interior of

Poland. Taking 8 cannon, 500 Janissaries and Tatar cavalry, they went to *Paniowce* (close to the castle of Kamianets-Podolski).

"After having arrived they bombarded the fortress all day, and fired at it from janissary-rifles but they could not do any damage, and all they could do was to kill a number of men, and then they returned [to the camp at Chocim] with a long face" (Auxent)

September 28 – From early morning until late evening, stiff, all-out Turkish assaults were taking place where virtually the entire Turkish army was involved. The main forces were directed against the Lisowczyks, while minor attacks were directed towards both of the gates in the Polish-Lithuanian camp and the Cossacks. From the opposite side of the Dniester River the Tatars feigned an attack across the river, counting on panic to erupt among the Polish units. Despite all these concentrated onslaughts, every Turkish attempt apparently failed. However, by the end of the day, and unknown to the Turks, the Polish army was left only with one remaining barrel of gunpowder! They were also dangerously short of musket shot. By the end of the fighting, the heroic desperation levels were such that the Lisowczyk forces were firing with pieces of metal and glass instead of musket balls. Likewise, the Polish artillery had turned to using grass as cannon wadding! Coincidentally, that usage of grass for wadding by the Polish artillery convinced the Turks to suspect the Poles of employing sorcery or witchcraft...

Ultimately, the attacks on that day were also the last ones in the battle of Chocim. Mistakenly, they were carried on, because it was thought that the Polish soldiers were demoralized and weakened enough to give in. Perhaps what could have also suggested to such an abrupt finalization of the battle was the fact of the Poles and Cossacks shortening and consolidating their defense lines. Also taken into consideration was the thought that the sudden absence of Chodkiewicz would have significantly weakened the morale of the Christian forces. In the Turkish camp, they were well-aware of the fearful situation regarding the lack of a necessary food supply for the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack soldiers. The blocking of the camp had lasted for nearly four weeks. The exchange rate for food increased substantially in the besieged camp. There was also a dangerous shortage of fodder for the horses. According to one of the mercenary German soldiers, until the 29th September, 24,000 horses died of hunger in the Polish-Lithuanian camp. But not everybody could afford such '*rarity*' as horse carrion. The situation of the infantry was notably tragic, because they didn't take as many supply wagons as did the cavalry. The anonymous German soldier mentioned above described suicidal deaths of soldiers:

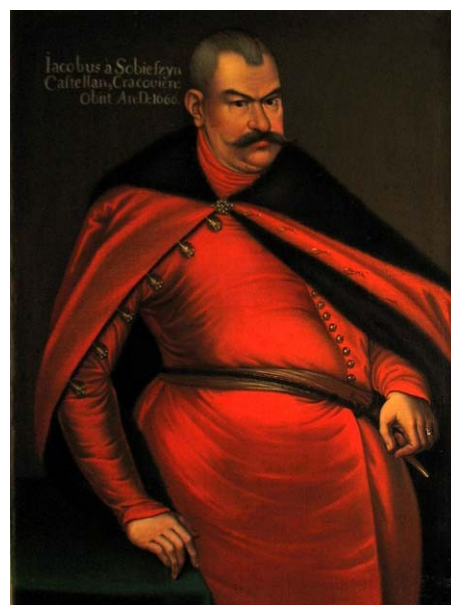
"As I found out from the reliable source, two people committed a suicide because of starvation. They came on the bridge, shouted 'Jesus' twice and jumped to the river and drowned."

Large numbers of people were dying as well, and many had already deserted. However, the situation in the Turkish camp was not much better. For the Turks, the coming cooling autumn weather was especially difficult and dangerous. Adding to that, was the obvious awareness that they had not achieved any tangible success which took its toll and notably weakened the morale of the Muslims as well.

Realizing after all, and after the last desperate attempt to decide about the battle by force, the Turkish commanders were finally willing to negotiate seriously for an end to the war. That decision was also influenced by the carefully circulated rumor spread by the Poles that 20,000 Don Cossacks (the subjects of the Russian Tsar) were coming to help and support the Christian forces in the battle of Chocim and so was the Polish king himself!

September 29 – October 8 – The activity of both sides decreased almost to a null. The Poles celebrated the triumph over the Turks for three days. A few minor flare-ups and skirmishes had taken place on **October 4** and **October 8**, but they did not have any consequential influence on the result of the war. What's more, on **October 1**, The Polish tabor wagons loaded with food and ammunition finally broke through the Tatars patrolling the east side of the river and arrived at the Chocim camp.

The most important aspect at this time was that the negotiations were being held. They were finalized and completed on the **8th of October** by signing pacts which concluded the war. Those pacts repeated in their general design, the Polish-Turkish agreements existing prior to the war. There were no territory changes and both sides pledged not to attack each other. The Poles promised that they would give back to the Moldavians their castle, Chocim, which was taken before the campaign in 1621.



Pic. 8 - Jakob Sobieski (father of Jan III Sobieski). He negotiated conditions of the treaty in 1621. His son, Jan Sobieski, defeated Ottoman army in the battle of Chocim 1673.

After the Battle

The battle of Chocim and the Polish-Turkish war of 1621 finished.

October 9, Soldiers of both sides were visiting each other in their respective camps, trading and drinking (sic!), celebrating the ending of the conflict. The Moldavian, *Miron Costin* noted:

"There were trades among the Poles and the Ottomans. Many Poles were buying Turkish horses and tents for very cheap prices. And the Ottomans were buying fabrics and pistols from the Poles."

October 10, The Turkish soldiers marched back, returning to their homes.

October 11, Likewise, the Polish soldiers moved on as well.

The losses of both sides were enormous. Thanks to the well-kept registers which were written after the war, the exact losses of the Polish-Lithuanian soldiers are recorded and known. About 2,000 soldiers died in combat, another 3,000 died of wounds, diseases and hunger. About 2,400 soldiers were missing or deserted.

It is more difficult to estimate the losses of the Cossacks. L. Podhorodecki's estimate are: approximately 3,000 Cossacks died in combat, another 3,000 died of wounds and hunger. All together, the losses of Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack army were nearly 14,000 soldiers.

Apart from the actual soldiers, many servants died. People were in such bad shape that they also died on the return march to their homes. Auxent noted that in his city, Kamianets-Podolski (One days of march from Chocim) 1,700 men died – German soldiers and servants.



Pic. 9 - Kamianets-Podilskyi castle

Civilian casualties, who the Tartars hunted for, should also be included. Ottoman source (*Naima effendi*) claims that:

"About 100.000 infidels were killed in the battle, skirmishes and [Tatar] raids"

Considering the source, this might be a slight exaggeration. But total casualties of Commonwealth inhabitants (soldiers, servants, Cossacks, civilians) must have reached a few tens of thousands of people actually killed. A lot of horses died as well. According to Auxent:

"There were many who [before the war] had had 10 horses, and only 2 or 3 were left [alive], and there were others who were left without a single horse."

The Turkish losses, according to Podhorodecki: approximate about 14,000 soldiers killed in combat, at least 14,000 died of wounds and diseases and there were thousands of deserters. All told nearly – 40,000 soldiers. Those numbers are confirmed by 2 Polish diaries.

Victory or Disaster?

The question given in this title may be surprising. The case seems to be a simple one – The armies of the Commonwealth repulsed a massive attack by the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent agreements that were finally signed were accepted as not beneath Polish dignity. However, that was just one side of the campaign of 1621. Let's look closer at how the war with Turkey influenced the Polish situation.

On one hand, the echo of the Commonwealth's triumph resounded entirely around all of Europe, increasing its prestige. The result of the Polish-Turkish combat foiled completely, the possibility of the Turkish-Russian and Swedish-Russian alliances against the Commonwealth, albeit a decision at the very last minute. Furthermore, any lingering danger from Turkey's side also decreased. The Ottoman Empire weakened by the Chocim war, ended up with a rebellion. Dissatisfied Janissary soldiers executed the warlike Sultan (a direct result of his death was a plan to reform the army and the administration) and found another one who was ready to keep peace with the recently well-accomplished Polish-Lithuanian-Commonwealth.

However, Poland as well, was going through her own problems with dissatisfied soldiers. That dissatisfaction occurred due to the delay of payments for their service to the country. While it was true that the Polish *Seym* (Parliament) decided on certain taxes in 1620, but the tax collection prolonged much more. The unpaid Polish army created a confederation that demanded the back-pay money which the soldiers well-earned and deserved. This striking army could now, not be used in Livonia, where the Swedes had been antagonizingly attacking for quite some time.

Lithuanian Field Hetman, *Krzysztof Radziwiłł* astonishingly stood up to the massive Swedish forces (about 18,000 soldiers) with his field army containing some 1,500 soldiers. Despite such disproportion, he tried to provoke the Swedes into the battle. Apprehensively, Swedish commander *Gustav Adolf* refused risking any confrontation with the Commonwealth's Lithuanian forces in any open battlefield combat. Radziwiłł could only complain of this situation to the Polish King, Sigismund III Vasa:

"Antiquity has its virtues; domestic methods have great value, but in military affairs less than in others: every century teaches soldiers some new trick; every campaign has its own discoveries; each school of war seeks its own remedies. Gustav's father Karolus, whenever he heard of the approach of our army, immediately abandoned his sieges and rushed into the field to fight a battle... But [Gustav], mindful of his father's defeats, conducts war in a new way, not risking field engagements; therefore one must fight him by taking account of his obstacles"

Gustav Adolf's goal was the city of *Riga* that he surrounded and captured with no problem on the 25th of September 1621. Radziwiłł could not have prevented that because he did not have enough soldiers at his disposal (especially infantry) that could have been able to attack the Swedish earthworks.

The Polish-Swedish campaign in Livonia, of 1621-1622 was finished with the truce leaving in Swedish hands, the trophies they already had. It meant that the Commonwealth lost northern Livonia – and this was the price that the Polish-Lithuanian-Commonwealth ultimately paid for with the victorious war against Turkey.

Appendix 1

Old maps of Chocim and its neighborhood (by courtesy of Jerzy Czajewski)



1651



1775



1788

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