

Hungarian Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire

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The first century (down to the battle of Mohács)

After the Ottomans had crushed the Balkan states one after the other in the late fourteenth century and had reduced the Serb principality into vassalage following their victory in 1389, they arrived at the borders of Hungary. In 1390, for the first time in history, Ottoman armies invaded the country.

At that time the Kingdom of Hungary was one of the largest states of Europe. Due to its accomplishments in civilization, its military force and its century-long service in the defence of the southern and eastern frontiers of the Christian community (*respublica christiana*) the country was held in high esteem in the western world. The Hungarian kings wore such respectful titles as “the defender of Christianity” (*defensor christianitatis*), “the champion of Christ” (*athleta Christi*) or “the warrior of Christian faith” (*miles fidei christiane*), while their country was regarded by the whole of Europe as its eastern “gate” (*porta*). The Hungarian state not only contained the attacks from the East (for example the Mongol invasion or the raids of the Golden Horde) but, with the support of the Papacy, it also led a series of “missionary” campaigns against the neighbouring states, the Patarens (or Bogomils) and Eastern Christians, who were considered “heretics”, “schismatics” or “rebellious”. It was during such a campaign that the Hungarian king first encountered Ottoman troops (1375).

At the beginning the leaders of Hungary did not realize that the new enemy was different in every respect from the ones they had previously met in the region. The appearance of the Ottomans only meant for them (and for the other leaders of Europe, too) that in the future they would have to face a new type of “heresy” in the Balkans. The merging of “schismatics” and “Muslims” was also facilitated by the fact that the

Balkan peoples tended to appear on the battlefields as the allies of the Ottomans. Thus in the Hungarian view it was more than natural to rank the “Turk” among the “heretics” and it took them quite a while to recognize the enormous difference between the two categories. This view survived in the next decades, but, also parallel to it, new definitions emerged (mainly after the crusade of Nicopolis in 1396), which slowly ousted the previous ones and determined the image of the Ottomans in Hungary for a long time. First of all the “savage, heathen and godless Turkish nation” became the “chief enemy and persecutor” (*inimicus capitalis, persecutor*) of the royal dignity (*rex*) and the country (*regnum*), which from time to time was also called “Tartar” or “Turkish-Tartar pagan”. The latter was obviously a deliberate but rather suggestive exaggeration: in Hungary, which still had dreadful memories of the Mongol invasion, nothing could express the amount of danger more vividly than associating the new enemy with the Mongols. As the king and the nobility regarded themselves as the representatives of the Christian community and the attacks they suffered as the grievance of universal Christianity, they at the same time identified the Ottomans with “the enemy and persecutor of Christ’s cross and of Christian faith”. The Ottomans as “persecutors of the country and faith” presented a twofold challenge to which the Hungarian ruling class responded unanimously: it confronted them and called for relentless struggle against them. A document by King Sigismund (1387–1437) listed those motives which necessitated resistance and counterattack: 1. compassion for the sufferers, 2. “the honest duty of defence”, 3. the injustice against Christians and 4. against the Saviour. Thereby he exclaimed that the defence of the country and the retaliation (that is an offensive war) for the “injustice” committed by the Ottomans was the moral, political and religious duty of the country’s leaders, mainly that of the king. As a result, the latter soon became “the shield and bulwark of Christian faith” (*scutum atque murus*) both in domestic public opinion and in the eyes of the authorities of the Christian republic, as it was first formulated by Pope John XXIII in 1410. From his position it followed that, should he be unsuccessful during the performance of his duty

(that is defeated by the Ottomans), it could only happen with “the consent of God’s secret verdict”.

The Hungary of the Hunyadi and Jagiellonian era (1440–1526) basically maintained the image of the Turks and its own role that was formed during Sigismund’s reign, but under the influence of everyday experience and new ideological trends (humanism, ecclesiastical spiritual movements, etc.) this image underwent some modifications. The Ottomans continued to be the “chief enemy”, what is more they were promoted to be the “arch or eternal enemy”. It became a general conviction that the Ottomans were a “natural foe”, who not only wished to defeat their enemies but sought to annihilate their identity; they were threatening their neighbours because they were guided by hatred and revenge. The letter of János Hunyadi to Pope Nicolaus V on September 17, 1448, written by the excellent humanist János Vitéz summarized this idea expressively: “If my memory does not fail me, the spiteful weapons of the Turks have been lurking around Europe for a hundred years now. They conquered Greece, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania in quick succession... enslaving them, depriving them of their religion, forcing onto them foreign face, foreign morals, foreign laws and the language of the infidels. They showed no mercy either to the rights of the people or to those of God. ... The devastating plague spread from there to the direction of all the other neighbours. Recently it nearly got as far as the centre of Europe, and now it set foot at the door of our country and homeland... For more than sixty years we have been facing the flaming anger of war, only by ourselves, with the arms of one nation. We are holding out, though we are exhausted by the numerous defeats, warfare and mourning. ... To sum everything up in a few words: we have not suffered so much by any other foe before, and apart from the memory of freedom we are left with nothing else but our weapons and courage, as many a time we have got into extreme peril... Because there is no such cruelty that has not been committed against us and it will never end, either we lose or win: the enemy will always be on us for its hatred supersedes even its strength. Our enemy... even now wants not victory, but to take revenge on us.”

The idea that the Ottomans would not relinquish the intention to conquer Hungary (or as more and more thought, the whole Christian world) did not paralyze the spirit of resistance at all, instead it awakened it. János Hunyadi, who was regularly defeated in his decisive battles, was admittedly preoccupied with how the “pagans” could be expelled from Europe. The war against them “will be completed only if we persecute the defeated enemy, and we will not give up until our hope is achieved by expelling them from Europe”, he wrote to Pope Nicolaus in September 1448. This thought became so heavily rooted in public opinion that, at the beginning of the 16th century, when the victory over the Ottomans lacked every real footing, Bálint Hagymási still encouraged the Hungarians to try to vanquish them in one of his poems entitled *Ad Pannoniam* (1509).

In relation to this concept, following the propaganda of the papal court and of foreign and Hungarian humanists, Hungary was called with increasing frequency “the bulwark of Christianity” (*propugnaculum et antemurale christianitatis*) towards the middle of the 15th century. The metaphor “shield” and “wall”, which was originally applied only for the Hungarian king, was gradually extended to the whole of the country and her inhabitants and the symbolic function of the “bulwark”, although claimed by other countries as well, became the prerogative of Hungary in the European and Hungarian public opinion. Though the Hungarian ruling class did not deny this privilege to the Polish either, it was convinced that the country played a unique role in Europe. István Brodarics, a partisan of King John (1526–1540) and the Ottoman political orientation, at the beginning of his account about the decisive battle at Mohács (1526), did claim that not only the preceding 70-80 years (from the emergence of the topos) but the whole of Hungarian history had consisted of constant sacrifices in the defence of Europe: “Since that time when we came out of Scythia led by the gracious Christ God and we accepted the faith of Christ, we have always been the shield and bulwark of all other Christians and ... in this service to Christianity, which in our opinion has been excellent, we have already lost two kings, ... besides them so many aristocrats, so many noblemen and soldiers, the innumerable multitude of commoners. We will think even afterwards [after

the battle of Mohács] that our actions in favour of the Christian society deserve praise, even if [somebody] should find another nation which would defend it against the enemy with its own blood and at its own expenses for more than five hundred years.”

The way of thinking of the peasantry in the 15th century is not so well-known as that of the aristocrats and churchmen, but what is known reflects an attitude identical to that of their lords. Apparently, all layers of Hungary identified themselves in a surprising unanimity with the profession outlined in the symbol of bulwark, so the Ottoman threat greatly reinforced the feeling of interdependence and coherence within the country. It seems that the parallel drawn between becoming an Ottoman subject (slave) and damnation was not restricted to the upper layers, but it permeated the thinking of the whole of Hungarian society.

After the mid-15th century the view of the Turks and the model of behaviour towards them became more and more imbued with theological-eschatological elements. This process was obviously fed by the growing Ottoman pressure and by the bitter experience that, despite all efforts, the country continued to perish, its resources were at low ebb and it was increasingly left alone with the “common” enemy. Already in the letters of János Hunyadi the image of “deterioration” or even “final perishing” emerged, the vision that the country on her own would not be able to cope with the uneven struggle. That it was not a mere rhetorical means is clear from the fact that Hunyadi (i.e. his spokesman János Vitéz) several times referred to the possibility of *martyrdom* symbolized by “the celestial crown”. Apparently, it is in connection with this view that the commander and his chancellor regularly explained the misfortunes of the anti-Ottoman warfare by reference to the divine will. After the battle at Kosovo (1448) they claimed that “it is too little we have suffered so far compared to our sins”, and that the disaster resulted from “God’s will to punish”.

This concept was by no means original. Since the beginning of the eighth century, when the work of Pseudo-Methodius concerning the Muslim expansion was translated into Latin and its ideas were spread by the apocalyptic currents, it had been considered a common-place in the western world that the Muslims (Saracens) had belonged to the

apocalyptic nations, who were sent against the Christians by God to punish them for their sins. This view emerged in Hungary already in the mid-13th century when King Béla IV attributed the “storm” of the Mongol invasion to the “sins of mankind”. Thus, by referring to sinfulness and punishment, Hunyadi and his circle did nothing else but go back to the universal tradition; at the same time, they added something very important to it, which became the source of consolation and hope for those fighting against the Ottomans. In their opinion, one must not argue with the rightfulness of divine punishment; instead one must do penance, then God will have mercy on the sinners. This was all the more so because they firmly believed that “heaven punished with the aim of instruction, not devastation”. At the same time, they found hope in the instructive purposes of heaven: “we are *consoled* by seeing *educational warning* in heaven’s punishment, not murderous intent”. They concluded from all this that it was silly to worry about the outcome of events as it was a matter within God’s competence; the “instructed ones” could only do one thing: prepare for the war against the Ottomans with undaunted hope.

The notions of educating or instructing God and the Ottomans as a tool of His were such thoughts that were to occupy an important part of Luther’s tenets seventy years later. Luther, upon similar considerations, called the Ottomans “schoolmasters” because in his view they embodied the chastising power of God. While, however, it took Luther a long struggle to get from this point to agreeing to the fight against the Ottomans, the Hungarian leaders of the mid-15th century never for a minute concluded from “God’s punishments” that they should relinquish the defence of their homeland and Europe.

Other motifs, however, such as the tenet of sinfulness, the feeling of being the elect and the closely related notion of the Turk as equivalent to Antichrist, as well as some chiliastic expectations had found a fertile soil in the monastic orders here; particularly among the Paulines founded in Hungary, the Observantine Franciscans, the Carthusians, and through them they affected a large part of the peasantry, too.

Osvát Laskai (c. 1450-1511), the vicar of the Franciscan province for several years at the turn of the sixteenth century, in a sermon of 1498 identified Antichrist with the

Ottomans. For him – like for many of his 15th-century predecessors – the appearance of Antichrist was a sign of the imminent last age, but he rejected that the advance of the eschatological enemy should be viewed inactively. In his opinion the resistance, the defence of the “homeland” (*patria*) was a moral obligation of the whole society, without distinction between gentlefolk and peasantry (thus far superseding the contemporary position of the nobility who excluded the peasantry from the concept of the nation). Thus he conceived the Hungarian nation as an organic community which he finally identified with the “elect” (*electi*); for him not only the upper classes or those performing constant military services but the whole of the Hungarian people were God’s chosen people whose duty was to carry the shield of Christianity “against the Grand Turk, so that Holy Christianity could enjoy the much-desired peace by means of their eminence and audacity”.

The Hungarian peasants who were under strong Franciscan influence, believed themselves to be “soldiers of Christ”, “the blessed people” who, when defending the country’s frontiers, actually protected the Christian faith against the apocalyptic enemy. Thus, anti-Ottoman fighting and salvation were linked both in the popular ideas about crusade and in the elite culture of Hungarian humanism. A similar correlation can be detected concerning another ideological element: analogies between themselves and the Jewish people of the Old Testament were often established by various groups of the Hungarian society. The semblance in the sufferings of the chosen new people and the Jews had already been stressed by the Hungarian Hussites of the early 15th century. The view that the plight of the Hungarians could best be illuminated by the example of the Jewish people, must have widely spread in the country by the early 16th century. They thought that the tribulation of God (i.e. the Turk) afflicted them for their sins, but if they would understand the educational intention of God, that is, they would repent and execute their divine duties—the protection of Christianity—, God would eventually receive them in his grace and liberate them from the persecutions.

To sum up the afore-mentioned, during the hundred years or so before the battle of Mohács, Hungarian society gradually recognized that the Ottoman expansion was not

simply a foreign policy issue, but also a problem that threatened with the loss of the country's internal equilibrium and identity. This recognition awoke the spirit of resistance in the overwhelming majority of society, and every stratum formulated (or adopted) an ideology for its resistance and an image of the Turk resulted from the former. Despite the huge social differences and the conflicts between nobility and common people, these ideologies displayed surprising similarities. Both the governor-general, whose letters were written by prominent humanists, and the mobilized peasants ascribed the appearance of the Ottomans to the tenet of sinfulness, and both hoped that by doing penance, following God's counsel, they could banish the ills from the country. In harmony with European tendencies, they increasingly placed the irresistibly advancing Ottomans in eschatological dimensions, seeing them as the apocalyptic people of the Last Days, the embodiment of Antichrist. They therefore derived the duty of resistance not only from the drive of natural instincts but also from Christian eschatological mysticism, assuming the role of defender of the country and Christianity. This generated a sense of selectedness which was expressed by the humanistic elite in the metaphor of "the bulwark of Christianity" and by the spiritual leaders of the lower strata (most of them friars) with the chiliastic concepts of "blessed people", "soldiers of Christ". The belief in the selectedness and in the analogies between the destinies of Jews and Hungarians was strengthened by the feeling that "the Hungarian people ordered to be the shield of Christianity" became increasingly isolated in their fight against the apocalyptic enemy. However, the seemingly hopeless situation only reinforced the awareness of the importance of their mission, the idea that by persevering, by sacrificing themselves, they could defeat the Ottomans, or at least obtain the gift of salvation.

This conviction was also visualized, which expressed the anti-Ottoman feelings of the contemporary Hungarian society much more clearly than the written declarations did. A curious form of this "visual attitude" is mentioned in a letter by the envoy of Modena, Tommaso Daniero, who wrote the following about the Lord's day festivity in Buda in 1501: "During the Lord's day procession – attended not only by a whole crowd

of people but His Royal Majesty (Vladislaus II) as well – an interesting spectacle was performed. For according to a prediction, the Mohammedan religion will be over when Mohammed's coffin is destroyed. This was produced as follows: Mohammed's mosque was erected in front of our house and the coffin was hanging in it surrounded by [the figures of] the sultan and the pashas. As His Royal Majesty and the procession came to the mosque, the coffin was struck by a great fire-brand and was enveloped in flame, together with the Turks around it. And what had not burnt down was attacked and ground to dust with cudgels and stones by the Hungarians who tore them also by their teeth. In fact, it was a great pleasure to watch this assault...”.

From the battle of Mohács (1526) to the end of the sixteenth century

The fall of the independent Hungarian state, the Ottoman occupation and the division of the country into three parts between 1526 and 1556 (Royal Hungary, Ottoman Hungary, Principality of Transylvania) shattered the image the Hungarian society had developed in one and a half centuries about the Ottomans and the resistance against them. However, contemporary Hungarians took only a few decades to reconstruct fully a picture that was conspicuously similar to the original in detail, but on the whole different from it. Now the view of the Turk was primarily shaped by the victorious Protestant and shared by the considerably weakened Catholic side as well. The Protestant ideology set the Ottoman issue into a coherent system and was able to offer consolation and hope and to formulate the attitude to be adopted under the given circumstances.

At first sight, this concept (which developed in full by the 1570s) was the simple adaptation of the Wittenbergian theology and view of history elaborated by Luther and Melanchton. In actual fact, however, the Hungarian Protestant theologians and preachers did no more than reach back to the Hungarian tradition shattered a few decades earlier and arranged it in a new system on the basis of the apocalyptic, eschatological determinism of Wittenberg. At the core of this ideology is the

explanation. The Protestants argued that the victory of the Ottomans and devastation in their wake was the punishment of God whose wrath was brought about by the sins of the Hungarians. But God did not place such a blow on the Hungarians for naught: like the Jews in days of yore, now He liked this nation best, He had chosen them for his purpose; his wrath served the good of these people, his blows were meant to edify and stimulate repentance. If the chosen people understood his intention and became purified, God would embrace them again and bring liberation from the Ottomans. By this intellectual construction the reformers freed the individual from the burden of self-accusation by the idea of collective punishment addressed to the chosen people, they also acquitted the community from their responsibility for the excessive might of the Ottomans. In the sermons and tracts of the preachers the country became a battlefield because the end of the world was approaching; the Ottomans became the people of Gog, the physical Antichrist, the ravaging emissary of Satan. In keeping with the dual Antichrist conception of Wittenberg, most set the Pope, the spiritual Antichrist, next to the Ottomans. The clash between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires was described as the encounter between the apocalyptic powers of the Last Age, and the territory of Hungary was regarded as a stage where the crucial events of world history occurred. With the passage of time, the preachers also began to incite to positive action and proclaimed the view that a morally purged, united and bravely fighting Hungarian society could itself liberate its own country. Yet, the expectations concerning the outcome of the fight of the two empires became more and more pessimistic after the mid-16th century; the number of those who thought that liberation would only come from God and the Last Judgement was increasing. At the same time, the mostly Protestant soldiers of the border castles, who, while accepting the notion of the guilty nation and that of Hungaro–Jewish relationship, adhered to the conception that Hungary was the “bulwark of Christianity” and that their holding out was the guarantee of the survival not only of the Christian faith, but also of the country itself. They thought that what was at stake in this struggle was “the preservation of our country, our beloved child and wife”, so it is one’s duty to resist “those heathen people”.

In the 17th century a certain split can be detected in the former monolithic anti-Turkish views of the Hungarians. On the one hand, an increasing orientation towards the Ottomans is discernible in the politics. The leaders of the anti-Habsburg movements and rebellions (especially in 1604–1606, the 1660s and 1678–1683) repeatedly accepted Ottoman support culminating in the Hungarian–Turkish alliance during the second Ottoman siege of Vienna (1683). On the other hand, even during the periods of closest cooperation with the Turks, Hungarians continued to regard them as their “natural foe” who “were always watching for their own opportunity”.

From the eighteenth century to the present day

In the 18th century, after the Ottomans had been expelled from Hungary (1699–1718) the image of the Turk underwent a gradual transformation. The causes of this change are manifold, the first and foremost being that Prince Ferenc Rákóczi, the head of the Hungarian war of independence (1703–1711) against the Habsburgs was given a refuge in the Ottoman Empire after his failure. A further impetus came from the process during which elements of the cultural heritage of the besieged enemy were gradually adopted by the Hungarians who adjusted Turkish motives, foods, musical instruments, etc. to their developing national identity as against the Habsburg imperial influence. (So, for example, the *tárogató*, regarded as one of the most characteristic Hungarian instrument, is nothing else than a modified version of Turkish *zurna*). As a result, by the end of the 18th century, anti-Turkish feelings were about to disappear. This was also encouraged by the fact that there was always knowing in Hungary of the common origins of the Hungarians and the Turks which came to be emphasized in the rising Hungarian national scholarship (first of all in historical sciences) too.

It was the period of reform movements starting in the 1820s, which had a strong national character and culminated in the 1848 revolution, when the Ottoman epoch was ultimately discovered in Hungary, since it could serve as a historical parallel and a symbol of fighting for Hungarian liberty. At the same time, this was the era of

romanticism and its exaggerations, subjectivism, and great emotions were also reflected in historiography. Undoubtedly, the evident resemblances between the two periods of trying to achieve national goals were the main underlying factors in the birth of a great number of works of art and an abundance of historical literature dealing with the Ottoman period. Then the suppression of the war of independence in 1849 prolonged the above-mentioned tendency. Further impetus was given by the fact that, similarly to the Rákóczi emigration, the leader (Lajos Kossuth) and numerous participants of the revolution took refuge in the Ottoman Empire and that during and after the Crimean war in the 1850–1860s, sympathy towards the Ottomans arose, since they seemed a potential support against the Habsburgs and a potential ally against the threat of Pan-Slavism and Russia (at least on spiritual level). This is how cordial relationships developed between some Ottoman and Hungarian intellectuals.

In this environment, Turcophile views and anti-Habsburg sentiments could easily be projected on to past events, thus for many people the Principality of Transylvania became the symbol of Hungarian independence and national unity, the Ottoman Empire the supporter of the Hungarian national idea, and the Habsburg Empire the oppressor of the same. A Hungarian historian whose impact on Hungarian public opinion and historiography was tremendous, Sándor Takáts (1860–1932), portrayed both the conquering Ottomans and the Hungarians, who were attempting to withstand them, in a highly favourable light bordering on partiality. In his accounts, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries became the age of romanticism and heroism: Turks and Hungarians were equally presented as chivalrous, courageous, and honest adversaries. The famous orientalist, Árminius Vámbéry and the polymath-architect Károly Kós set forth similar views. In his excellent book on the architecture of Istanbul, Kós wrote the following: „For us, Hungarians [Sultan Süleyman, the conqueror of Hungary!] represents the opening of the Ottoman rule in Hungary, of sufferings beyond words and uninterrupted struggle for life; the most tragic pages of our history begins with his name. However, he equally marks the beginning of a Hungarian age of chivalry, the formation of our national self-respect, the birth of our racial consciousness, and the

beginning of our wars of independence against the Habsburgs; he marks the birth of the Hungarian language and national culture, and the period when the freedom of conscience was being codified. He inaugurates the creation of Transylvania as a separate Hungarian world which took refuge with his power from the western enemy.”

Along with the pro-Turkish sentiments, a strong anti-Turkish attitude too remained influential in Hungary in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. The protagonists of this intellectual current regarded the conquering Turks as the main responsible for and the cause of all subsequent misery in Hungarian history. This trend was most effectively represented by Gyula Szekfű (1883–1955), the most respected figure of Hungarian historiography and intellectual life of the interwar period. He considered the Habsburg-Hungarian–Ottoman wars to have been a struggle between two civilisations, “the West and the East” in which the “Turkish slave state seized victory while the traces of Hungarian European civilisation were wiped out”. The wars and existential insecurity that accompanied the Turkish conquest gave rise to the “anti-culture of the *puszta* (‘desert’)” on the Hungarian Plain and to marshland and bog elsewhere. The climate, land and soil of Hungary was irreparably damaged. The military campaigns, the tyranny and the indifference of the Turkish state towards the needs of its subjects plunged the Hungarian nation into a demographic disaster: its ancient lands were settled by immigrants from the Balkans, who arrived in the wake of the Turkish invasion. “We may search in vain for the positive effects of Turkish rule. We are talking about two opposing cultures, whose natural relationship is one of conflict.” In the final analysis, the Turkish wars lasting for 300 years diverted Hungarian history from its natural course, therefore “the Turkish conquest was the greatest, probably the only catastrophe in the nation’s history.”

While most competent Hungarian historians of today do not accept this position in this particular form, they nevertheless consider the consequences of the Ottoman wars and occupation to have been extremely grave. Of course this was not just because of the alien (non-European) nature of the conquerors’ rule and their different culture etc., but above all because they turned the country into a battlefield for a period lasting three

hundred years (if we include the fifteenth century). The scholars consider the period between the middle of the sixteenth century and the end of the seventeenth century, when the defence systems of the two adversaries were being established in the middle of the country, to have been particularly disastrous. Ferenc Szakály, who compiled the most comprehensive survey of the period, was of the view that the misfortune affecting the Hungarian nation as a result of the battlefield conditions could be summarised under the following headings: 1. demographic disaster; 2. change in the ethnic composition in favour of the nationalities (which lay at the root of Hungary's dismemberment in the twentieth century); 3. destruction of the medieval settlement pattern (decline of the former economic centres); 4. destruction of productive forces; 5. stagnation of the economy and commerce; 6. loss of the political independence of the country. Although he considered the latter to have been a loss, he nevertheless shared the view that without the financial and military support of the Habsburgs the Ottoman conquest would have swallowed up the remaining parts of Hungary.

These critical observations notwithstanding, both Hungarian public and experts in the common Hungarian-Turkish past are now capable to see the one-time enemy and its descendants, the Turks of today without much bias. While for most Hungarians the phrase "we have survived the disasters caused by the Tatars and the Turks" is a clear reference to the devastating shared past, the cordial connections of the last two centuries (especially the period between the two world wars) and the friendly behaviour of the Turks towards the Hungarians in general overcame the former prejudice against them. I would like to highlight this change in the Hungarian way of thinking of the Turks by recalling two examples.

1. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Géza Gárdonyi, the renown Hungarian writer published a historical novel on the Ottoman siege of the fortress of Eger (1552) entitled "The Stars of Eger". The negative hero of the book is a janissary, a Turk, whose name is Yumurdjak. He kidnaps the son of one of the defenders' commanders who belongs to the chief characters in the novel. Since the "Stars of Eger" became a cult-book, because it portrays a rare and significant Hungarian success, for a long time if

somebody was nicknamed Yumurdjak, it meant that he was declared an enemy. We can safely state that Yumurdjak, the Turk embodied the notion of enemy in the eyes of the Hungarians for generations.

2. The second example comes from the middle of the 1990s when a park ('sanctuary') was opened in the outskirts of Szigetvár – right on the place where Sultan Süleyman died during the siege of the fortress (1566). In the centre of the park called as "the Park of Hungarian–Turkish Friendship" a giant statue of the Ottoman ruler was erected. Some years later a statue of Nikolaus Zrínyi, the Hungarian commander-in-chief of Szigetvár was also raised. Now the two adversaries are standing side by side and watching the remnants of the castle. From time to time Hungarian and Turkish groups arrive – often together –, they sing their respective national anthems, they crown with wreath the statue of their own hero and they go home in peaceful harmony. This clearly shows that for them the vicissitudes of the common past really became history. We think this attitude provides us with a model worth of the attention of other nations, too.