

From Slavery to Freedom: the Fate of Margaret Himfi

ISTVÁN PETROVICS

THE ANGEVIN kings who ruled Hungary in the fourteenth century—nominally between 1301 and 1387—had extensive contacts with the other branches of the same dynasty, as well as with other European ruling houses.¹ Beside these significant political contacts, due to the consolidation of royal power and the reorganization of the realm's economy, Hungary was a major factor in the political, economic and military life of fourteenth-century Europe.² Regarding the Anjou era, it also should be remembered that the military activity of Hungary was particularly vigorous during the reign of Louis I who was able to expand his rule extensively over territories in the Balkans.³ Nevertheless, Hungary's status as a great power was seriously challenged in the late fourteenth century, partly by the "succession crisis" and partly by the emergence of a new enemy, the Ottoman Turks.

The domestic crisis was more or less resolved when Sigismund of Luxemburg, the husband of Louis's elder daughter, Mary, became king of Hungary in 1387.⁴ Another, more threatening danger, the Ottoman expansion, reached Hungary in 1389 and the realm was soon compelled to adopt a defensive policy to counter this menace. From this time on until the battle of Mohács in 1526 (which marks the end of the independent Kingdom of Hungary) the realm lived almost without interruption under the constant menace of Ottoman raids and invasions.⁵ This state of affairs, besides straining Hungary's economic and military resources to the absolute limit, also led to internal conflicts in the realm. These conflicts were generated by the situation in which the nobility found the necessity of a defensive policy unacceptable and shameful. They demanded the same offensive attitude against the Ottomans as had for so long prevailed towards others. For these failures the nobles blamed whoever happened to be in power. Consequently, the internal conflict frequently resulted in serious political struggles between the different "parties" in domestic political life.

In early 1389, Lazar, prince of Serbia, confirmed his allegiance to Sigismund, King of Hungary, but soon afterwards, on 15 June, he was killed in the battle of Kosovo. The most important consequence of this battle was that the son of Lazar, Stephen Lazarević, became the vassal of the Ottomans.⁶ This explains how in early 1390 Ottoman troops were able to devastate the region around Temesvár (today Timișoara, Romania). In 1391

they did the same in the Szerémség (today Srem, a region located between the Rivers Danube and Sava and divided between Croatia and Serbia), and thereafter their incursions became regular occurrences.⁷ King Sigismund took the threat seriously from the very first moment. As early as the autumn of 1389, he led a campaign to Serbia and took two fortresses by siege, and he repeated the military action in the following two years. At this time, King Sigismund was not so successful in Moldavia and Wallachia. The former had shifted back under the influence of Poland, while the latter had passed temporarily under the suzerainty of the Ottomans, who raided Transylvania for the first time in 1394.⁸

The wars were exhausting and the results only temporary. Therefore, Sigismund decided to settle the Turkish problem once and for all. He organised a major enterprise with the ambitious aim of driving the Ottomans out of Europe. As a result of his efforts the Pope declared the planned campaign a crusade, and by the summer of 1396 an army of considerable size had assembled. Alongside the Hungarians, the core of the army was made up of Frenchmen, with John of Nevers, heir to Burgundy, at the head, and knights also came from Germany, Bohemia, Italy and even England. In the battle that took place on 25 September 1396 the crusader army was virtually destroyed, allegedly as a consequence of the ill-considered actions of the French knights.⁹

The catastrophe of Nicopolis demonstrated that the Ottoman Empire represented a power against which Hungary was unable to launch an offensive war, even with the support of the "West". As for Hungary, from that time on, priority was given to defence rather than to offensive campaigns, and the kingdom had to learn how to live with the constant menace of Ottoman incursions. The latter statement is of great importance, since the Ottomans did not, in fact, try to conquer Hungary for a long time. In contrast with the Balkan states, which were easily crushed, the medieval Kingdom of Hungary was to remain a rival of the Ottoman Empire right up to the end of the fifteenth century. To put it another way: for approximately a century it was not Hungary's existence that was primarily jeopardized, but the supremacy that the kingdom had been able to impose upon its southern neighbours. The psychological effects of this new situation was also important. Hungary, which had not suffered a major external attack since the Mongol invasion of 1241/42, now found herself exposed to brutal plundering raids by the Ottomans year after year.¹⁰

Several serious steps were taken in order to avert the Ottoman campaigns and to halt their advance in Hungary. After his defeat at Nicopolis (1396), King Sigismund of Luxemburg totally reorganized his country's defence system. First introduced at the diet of Temesvár (present-day Timișoara, Romania) in 1397 and further developed under Sigismund's successors, the new multi-layered defence system consisted of buffer or vassal states (e.g. Serbia, Bosnia, Wallachia); the *banates*; two parallel lines of border forts situated along the southern borders of the country; and the Hungarian field army, as a last resort in case the Ottomans broke through the first three layers of defence.¹¹

During their plundering raids in the fifteenth century the Ottomans abducted, killed and forced to flee hundreds of thousands of Hungarians. These raids affected mostly the southern territories of the realm, especially the Szerémség, the Temes region and Transylvania.¹² The documentary evidence also clearly demonstrates that the Ottoman

advance caused a great shift in the ethnic make-up of the population of these regions. Many of those Hungarians who had survived the brutal Ottoman onslaughts migrated to the central parts of the realm, and in their place, from the fifteenth century on, a large number of Romanians and Serbs arrived. The immigrants continued to use the original Hungarian place-names of the area in question, but obviously adapted them to their own language, as is shown by the analysis of the Turkish state-tax returns from the late sixteenth century.¹³ The above changes taking place in the Temesköz in the Late Middle Ages also had an impact on the ethnic make-up of the town of Temesvár itself, which was the most significant castle and town in the Danube–Tisza–Maros region. Nevertheless, the *deFTER* produced in 1554 proves that among the inhabitants of the town, even two years after its fall to the Turks, the Hungarians still constituted the majority.¹⁴

From our special perspective the fate of the captives is interesting. Unfortunately, we have only sporadic documents informing us about their fate and the attitude of the Ottomans towards their captives.¹⁵ One of these sources was written by a man known as Georgius de Hungaria. George was a native of Transylvania, the eastern province of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. He was, probably, a Saxon by origin.¹⁶ The fifteen or sixteen year old boy, as we know it from his own work, went to study in the nearby town of Szászsebes (German: Mühlbach, Romanian: Sebeş). In 1438 Murad II and his troops besieged Szászsebes, which finally surrendered, but some of the people who defended the town, amongst them George himself, fled to a tower. The Ottomans put fire to the tower, and most of those who had taken refuge there died a horrible death. The survivors, including George himself, were captured by the Ottomans and were sold into slavery. He remained as a slave in the Ottoman Empire until 1458 when he managed to conclude an agreement of liberation with his last master, who had befriended him. Then he returned to Christian Europe and became a Dominican friar. He died in 1502, in the Eternal City. In 1481 George published in Rome a very famous work: *Tractatus de moribus, condicionibus et nequitia Turcorum*.¹⁷ Since this is the description of the world of the Turks by an eye-witness, George's work deserves special attention. It turns out from George's *Tractatus* that the captives meant a real "treasure" for the Ottomans. Flocks of merchants accompanied the marauding—mostly irregular—soldiers, who sold their captives to the merchants at once. In this way they did not have to take care of them any longer and they got the money for the captives immediately.¹⁸ Thousands of slaves from different regions, Hungary among them, were taken by the merchants to the island of Crete where they were sold to the Venetians who were the lords of the island in the period roughly between the early thirteenth and the middle of the sixteenth century.¹⁹

And so we arrive at the main figure of this paper, Margaret Himfi. She was the daughter of Dorothea of Essegvár and Benedict Himfi, ban of Vidin and count of Temes.²⁰ Although the precise date when she was captured by the Ottomans is still debated, and there are unexplored periods in her life, the last years of her captivity, with the help of newly discovered documentary evidence in the archives of Venice, can be elucidated properly.²¹ As a slave she was bought by Giorgio Darvasio, a Venetian living in Crete. Unfortunately, very little is known about the life and activity of Darvasio, who was evidently a Venetian subject and lived in the city of Candia, in Crete. A Hungarian

researcher, Péter E. Kovács has recently found several copies of his testament in the Venetian archives.²² Giorgio Darvasio's last will reveals that his father was Marco Darvasio, while his mother was Ysabeta. Marco Darvasio had moved, at an unknown date, from Venice to Crete, where he lived as *burgensis* in Candia.²³ He may have earned his living by trading in a variety of products. It is highly probable that Marco Darvasio was a very successful merchant, since his son, Giorgio inherited from him a fortune of considerable value. In contrast with his father, Giorgio seems not to have worked as a merchant: he simply consumed his heritage, and invested the money that was left to him.²⁴ Documents surviving from the Middle Ages in the Venetian archives prove that he never married. Although he did not establish a family, he lived with several concubines, who bore him a number of children.²⁵ Margaret Himfi was one—and perhaps the dearest—of these concubines. It is highly probable that Giorgio Darvasio bought her on the slave market in Crete.²⁶ Margaret soon learnt Italian, and although she did not have the chance to practice her mother tongue in Crete, she did not forget the Hungarian language. Although Margaret was treated by Darvasio “*humane, honorabiliter et benigne*”, she herself made several attempts to inform her family about her whereabouts, while the members of the Himfi family also did everything in order to find her. The quest—on the details of which we have no information—was finally successful. The representative of the Himfi family, Nicholas Marcali, former voivode of Transylvania, having met Darvasio in Candia and having identified Margaret, made an agreement with her master.²⁷ According to the bargain Giorgio Darvasio assented to the return of Margaret and her daughters to Hungary, while Nicholas Marcali, who at the time of the agreement—for unknown reasons—was unable to take Margaret with him, promised to come back for her and the children to Crete afterwards. Marcali also assured Darvasio and Margaret that—if he were unable to return to Crete—he would entrust somebody with the task of taking Margaret and her daughters to Hungary. Marcali, finally, agreed to arrange Darvasio's—or his representative's—visit to Hungary, if the father would like to see his daughters.

An undated note, written about the case of Margaret Himfi and addressed to Sigismund of Luxemburg, King of Hungary, informs us about the further developments.²⁸ Giorgio Darvasio not only manumitted Margaret and her daughters, but took them—at his own expenses—to Venice, whence it would have been much easier for them to travel to Hungary than from Crete. Then, as the note says, quite unexpectedly a relative of Margaret, a certain John, son of Ban Dionysius of Redel appeared in Venice. Giorgio Darvasio gave him money and asked John to accompany Margaret and her daughters to Hungary. According to the note it was rumoured that John—on their way to Hungary—had robbed Margaret of all her goods and disappeared without any sign with the stolen money and articles. It is regrettable—since other documents do not make any reference to him—that nothing else is known about this John. At this point it is important to note that the whole story of the robbery was known only from rumours, therefore the possibility cannot be discounted that it was merely a fictional account.²⁹ The note originated in the situation in which Darvasio—expecting the reimbursement of his costs—had complained to the Venetian council against Nicholas Marcali and John, son of Ban Dionysius of Redel, and the Signoria informed King Sigismund on the matter.

The note in question had to be written after Margaret's return to Hungary. Unfortunately, the document does not inform us about the details of Margaret's trip to Hungary, except the robbery. This is why the time of her departure from Venice and the date of her arrival in Hungary are also uncertain. Later events of her life can be followed with the help of a letter written by Francesco Bernardi, a Florentine by origin, who later became a citizen of Buda, the Hungarian capital.³⁰ The letter was inscribed on 10 November 1408, and sent to an unnamed friend of Bernardi.³¹ In addition to the addressee of the letter, Giorgio Darvasio, and a certain Piero Negro de Candia were also in contact with Bernardi who was the head of the Italian community living in Buda. Especially Darvasio counted on Bernardi, since he expected the reimbursement of his costs through Bernardi's mediation. Along with the Italians, Nicholas Marcali also asked Bernardi to study all the documents produced in Margaret's case.

From Bernardi's letter it comes to light that Margaret had settled in Buda long before 1408. Unfortunately, the document does not reveal in whose house Margaret lived in the Hungarian royal seat.³² Surprisingly enough, Nicholas Marcali had not been able to visit Margaret in Buda by November 1408. Bernardi believes that Marcali shows up soon in Buda, but he thinks, the former voivode would not do anything for Margaret.³³ We also know from the letter that Margaret's father, Benedict Himfi, was a good friend of Bernardi, but the latter had not heard anything about Margaret before consulting with Marcali about her case.³⁴ Although Margaret and Bernardi did not know each other in person, the women of Bernardi's household were in close contact with her. They and various other people recounted only good things about Margaret: they found her decent, tolerant towards others, thrifty and a good mother who took care of her daughters properly. To top it all, Margaret had a very good opinion of Giorgio Darvasio, whom she often praised. Although Bernardi did not play any role in the liberation of Margaret, he supported her in Buda, as he writes in his letter. It is highly regrettable that he does not enter into details concerning the concrete forms of this help. This is also the case with Marcali and the Himfi family: although Bernardi refers to their support, the precise facts remain obscure.

The most astonishing part of the letter is where Bernardi disagrees with Marcali's act of taking Margaret and her daughters to Hungary. Marcali should have known, writes Bernardi, that a girl/woman who recovers her freedom from Ottoman captivity is not welcome by her female relatives in the Christian world in general, and in Hungary, in particular.

Concluding Remarks

ALTHOUGH THE fate of Margaret Himfi is not typical of the girls and women who were captured by the Ottomans in Hungary—since she was a noble woman and her wealthy family had enough money to arrange Margaret's liberation—her life provides an opportunity for drawing general conclusions concerning the fate of women who were victims of warfare.³⁵ Direct and indirect evidence demonstrates that those women who were taken as captives and later sold as slaves by the Ottomans served most-

ly as concubines and wet nurses. If originally they belonged to a poor noble or peasant family it was not at all probable that their relatives would be able to help them to become free again. Even if it happened that some of them were liberated and were able to return to the place from where they had been abducted, they were—on account of their “past”—despised by their (female) relatives who were ashamed of them and therefore they were excluded from normal life. In this respect—as Margaret’s example shows—it did not make any difference if somebody returned from the Ottoman Empire or the Christian world. The life of women was significantly dissimilar from that of the men who were captured by the Ottomans. Men served mostly as soldiers. Many of them were wealthy barons or high dignitaries of the realm, for whom the Ottomans demanded huge ransoms. In most cases it was the task of the family to find the money to pay the ransom, but it also happened that a special tax was levied on the subjects of the realm in order to free the prisoners.³⁶ For common people—man and women—only one thing remained: good luck or the hope of a miraculous escape. □

Notes

1. The national ruling dynasty of Hungary, the house of Árpád, died out on the male line in 1301 with Andrew III. Charles I of Anjou, who succeeded Andrew III on the Hungarian throne, was the son of Charles Martel and Clementia of Habsburg. Charles’s great-grandfather, the brother of Louis IX of France, was Charles, Duke of Anjou, who managed to acquire the throne of Sicily and Naples in the 1260s, while his grandmother was Mary daughter of Stephen V, King of Hungary (1270–1272). Charles I was crowned king of Hungary three times: 1301, 1309 and 1310. It was only in 1310, due to the efforts of the papal legate, Cardinal Gentilis, that Charles I was finally crowned with the so-called Holy Crown, whose origin was associated with the founder of the Hungarian kingdom, Stephen I. Consequently, Charles I ruled as legitimate king of Hungary only between 1310 and 1342, although he himself regarded his first coronation as the beginning of his reign. In order to become the real master of the realm, Charles I had to crush the oligarchs (“little kings”), a process which was completed by 1323. Charles I was succeeded on the Hungarian throne by his son, Louis I who ruled between 1342 and 1382. Since Louis I had no male heir, it was Mary, his second daughter, who acceded to the throne after Louis’s death and ruled, with a short interruption, between 1382 and 1395. However, after Mary’s husband, Sigismund of Luxemburg was crowned King of Hungary in 1387, her role in political life was, in fact, nominal. The term Anjou era, in Hungary, in a broader sense, covers the period between 1301 and 1387. Nevertheless, in a narrower sense, it refers only to the consolidated rule of Charles I and his son, Louis I, and consequently covers the period between 1323 and 1382. See *Korai magyar történeti lexikon (9–14. század.)* Thereafter: KMTL, Editor-in-chief Kristó, Gyula, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994, s.v. “Anjou-kor”, “Árpádok”, “I. Károly”, “I. (Nagy) Lajos”, “Mária”. See also Pál Engel, *The realm of St Stephen. A History of medieval Hungary, 895–1526*, London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001, 124–204; István Petrovics, *Hungary and the Adriatic coast in the Middle Ages. Power aspirations and dynastic contacts of the Arpadian and Angevin kings in the Adriatic region*. Chronica. Annual of the Institute of History of the University of Szeged, vol. 5. Szeged, 2005. 62–73. István Petrovics, *William of Koppenbach and Valentin of Alsán, bishops of Pécs as diplomats*.

- In: *La Diplomatie des États Angevins aux XIII^e et XIV^e Siècles. Diplomacy in the countries of the Angevin dynasty in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries*. Actes du colloque international de Szeged, Visegrad, Budapest, 13–16 septembre 2007 sous la direction de Zoltán Korde et István Petrovics. Roma-Szeged, 2010. 303–311.
2. Hóman, Bálint, *A Magyar Királyság pénzügyei és gazdaságpolitikája Károly Róbert korában*. Budapest, 2003. (Reprint); Engel, *The realm of St Stephen*, *op. cit.* 124–194. Petrovics, István: *Medieval Pécs and the Monetary Reforms of Charles I*, in: István Petrovics, Sándor László Tóth, Eleanor A. Congdon (eds.), “In my Spirit and Thought I Remained a European of Hungarian Origin.” *Medieval Historical Studies in Memory of Zoltan J. Kosztolnyik*. Szeged: JATEPress, 2010. 123–135.
 3. Kristó, Gyula, *Az Anjou-kor háborúi*. Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1988. See also Engel, *The realm of St Stephen*, *op. cit.*, 157–167; Sebők, Ferenc “Hungary. Narrative (1300–1526)” and Petrovics, István, “Louis I”, in: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare and Military Technology*. 3 vols. Editor in chief: Clifford J. Rogers. Oxford University Press, 2010, vol. 2, 296, 529–530.
 4. Since Louis I had no sons, the question of succession caused a serious problem. When Louis died in 1382, his elder daughter, Mária (Mary) who had married Sigismund of Luxemburg, acceded to the throne, as was requested in the will of his father. However, the idea and practice of being ruled by a woman was not popular at all among the nobles of the realm. Consequently, they soon conspired against her. The main figures of the plot were the Horváti brothers, Paul, bishop of Zagreb and John, ban of Mačva. They supported Charles the Small of Durazzo, nephew of the duke who had been executed at Aversa. He ruled in Naples as Charles III between 1382 and 1386, while in Hungary he is known as Charles II. When the Horváti brothers invited him to Hungary, Charles did not hesitate to depart. He disembarked in Dalmatia in September 1385. Mária had no other choice than to renounce and Charles was crowned king of Hungary on 31 December 1385. Charles’s rule was, however, short-lived: the Queen mother, Elizabeth of Bosnia and the Garai party had him assassinated in early 1386. After the monarch’s death the Horváti brothers declared his son, László (Ladislaus of Naples) to be king of Hungary and took up arms in his name. On 25 July 1386 John Horváti and his followers fell upon the queen’s small army at Gorjani and slaughtered Palatine Nicholas Garai together with all who were held responsible for Charles’s death. The queens (Mary and Elizabeth) were imprisoned first in the castle of Gornec, then later in that of Novigrad, located on the Adriatic coast. Since the throne could no longer be left vacant, Mary’s husband Sigismund of Luxemburg was crowned king on 31 March 1387. Sigismund managed to liberate Mary from her prison with the help of the Venetian fleet in June 1387. Since then until her death in 1395, Mary did not actively intervene in government affairs. For the political events in question see Engel, *The realm of St Stephen*, *op. cit.*, 195–201. See also Süttő, Szilárd, *Anjou-Magyarország alkonya*, 2 vols., Szeged: Belvedere Meridionale, 2003; Petrovics, *Hungary and the Adriatic coast*, *op. cit.*, 71–72; Petrovics, István, *A Horváti lázadás és Pécs*. In: Fedeles, Tamás–Horváth, István–Kiss, Gergely (eds), *A pécsi egyházmegye vonzásában. Ünnepi tanulmányok Timár György tiszteletére*. Budapest: METEM, 2007, 285–293.
 5. Relations between the Hungarian Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire can be divided into three main periods. According to some scholars the first period started in 1375, with the earliest documented direct military conflict between Hungarian and Ottoman forces in Wallachia (present-day Romania), while others regard the battle of Kosovo in 1389 as the beginning of this period. There is, however, a consensus among historians concerning the end of the first period: it is claimed to last until the annihilation of the Hungarian army at the Battle of Mohács

(1526) at the hands of Sultan Süleyman I. This period was characterized by gradual Ottoman expansion in the Balkans, to the south of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, as well as by Hungarian attempts to halt the Ottoman advance by extending Hungarian influence in the Balkans and by building an anti-Ottoman defence system along the southern borders of Hungary. Nevertheless, with the collapse of this defence system by the early 1520s, the road to Hungary and central Europe was open for the Ottomans. The second phase of Hungarian-Ottoman relations started with the Battle of Mohács, which also marked the beginning of a long period of Habsburg-Ottoman military confrontation in central Europe. In order to understand this situation it is to be noted here, that the Habsburgs—with the election of Ferdinand I, the fallen king's brother-in-law, as monarch of Hungary—ruled the northern and western parts of the realm from 1526, while with the fall of Buda in 1541, central Hungary was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire and was ruled as an Ottoman province until 1699. This was a very unfortunate situation for Hungary, since the country became the major battlefield for 150 years in the Habsburg-Ottoman rivalry in Central Europe. The second period ended with the peace treaty of Karlowitz (today Sremski Karlovci in Serbia) in 1699. The third period lasted from 1699 until the collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires during World War I, and was characterized by the the situation in which the Ottomans lost Hungary to the Habsburgs and withdrew to the Balkans. See Szakály, Ferenc: *Phases of Turco-Hungarian warfare before the battle of Mohács (1365–1526)*. Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 33 (1979) 72–85; Dávid, Géza and Fodor, Pál (eds.), *Ottomans, Hungarians and Habsburgs in Central Europe: The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest*. Leiden: Brill, 2000; Ágoston, Gábor, “Hungary”. In: Ágoston, Gábor and Bruce Masters (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*. Facts on File, 2009. 255–258. See also the different entries on Hungarian-Ottoman warfare in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

6. For Stephen Lazarević see Aleksander Fotić “Serbia” in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, *op.cit.* 517–518. For the Battle of Kosovo see Aleksander Fotić “Kosovo, Battle of (1389)” in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, *op.cit.*, 317; Sebők, Ferenc “Kosovo Polje, Battle of (1389)” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 470–471.
7. Engel, Pál, *Magyarország és a török veszély Zsigmond korában, 1387–1437*. Századok 128 (1994) 273–283. For the region around Temesvár see Petrovics, István, *Urban development in the Danube-Tisa-Mureş Region in the Middle Ages*. Analele Banatului. Serie nouă. Arheologie–Istorie. IX. 2001. Timișoara, 2003. 389–390. For Srem see Kristó, Gyula and Takács, Miklós “Szerémség” in KMTL 642–643.
8. For Moldavia, Transylvania and Wallachia see Papp, Sándor “Moldavia” “Transylvania” and “Wallachia” in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, *op.cit.* 389–391, 570–571, 588–590. Se also Radu Lupescu “Romanian Principalities” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, 191–193.
9. Engel, *The realm of St Stephen*, *op. cit.*, 202–204. See also Bárány, Attila “Nicompolis, Battle of” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, 56–59.
10. For the Mongols and the disastrous battle of Muhi see Vásáry, István “Mongols” and Veszprémy, László “Muhi, Battle of” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, 19–20, 32–34. See also Engel, *The realm of St Stephen*, *op. cit.*, 98–100.
11. Engel, *The realm of St Stephen*, *op. cit.*, 204–206, 231–243. See also Petrovics, István, “Banates” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 116–117, Sebők, Ferenc “Militia portalis” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, 9–10; Ágoston, Gábor “Hungarian defense system” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare*, *op. cit.* vol. 2, 283–284.

12. Engel, *The realm of St Stephen*, op. cit., 330–334; Engel, Pál, *A török dúlások hatása a népességre: Valkó megye példája*. Századok 134 (2000) 267–320. A charter issued by King Sigismund on 17 August 1399 reveals that the monarch ordered the nobles, the towns and the judges to enforce the return to their original homeland (i.e. the Temes region) of those peasants, who had left the “Temesköz” during the Turkish incursions: “...*quilibet ex vobis iobagiones habens de ipsa terra nostra Temeskuz propter metum Turcorum evasos eosdem unacum rebus suis universis restituat sine omni recusa permittatque abire et in dictam terram nostram sub eundem nobilem eiusdem terre, cuius prefuit, descendere libere et quiete.*” Hungarian National Archives. Collection of charters issued before Mohács (1526) nr. 92112. The lords of the Temes region, especially the counts of Temes also made attempts to repopulate the devastated area. A royal charter, issued on 2 June 1407, relates that “...*idem Comes Pipo [i.e. Pipo of Ozora] Comitatus ipsos, qui antea per sepissimas inuasiones et creberrimos Turcorum Crucis Christi persecutorum insultus pene deuastati et depopulate extiterunt, sue sagacitatis ingeniosa industria et magni sui consilij prudentia, nec non actuum virtuosorum strenuositate ad pristinae integritatis statum reducendo, populorum multitudine plurimum decorant...*” See Wenzel, Gusztáv, *Okmánytár Ozorai Pipo történetéhez*. Történelmi Tár 1884. 20–21. Another example from the late fifteenth century: Francesco Grisellini, eighteenth-century traveller, natural scientist and historian of the ‘Banat’ stated that Pál Kinizsi, as *comes Temesiensis* after his triumphant campaign in Serbia in 1481, brought some 50 000 Serbians to Hungary upon his return, whom he settled around Temesvár (perhaps in the suburbs of the town). See Grisellini, Franz: *Versuch einer natürlichen und politischen Geschichte des Temeswarer Banats in Briefen an Standepersonen und Gelehrte*. 2 vols., Wien, 1780. Grisellini’s work was translated into Romanian and annotated by Costin Feneşan: *Încercare de istorie politică și naturală a Banatului Timișoarei*. Timișoara 1984, 56. Also cf. Petrovics, István, *The Bishopric of Csanád/Cenad and the Ecclesiastical Institutions of Medieval Temesvár/Timișoara*. Transylvanian Review 22 (2013) Supplement No. 4. 249.
13. Engel, Pál, *A temesvári és moldovai szandzsák törökkori települései (1554–1579)*. Szeged: Csongrád Megyei Levéltár, 1996; also cf. Hóvári, János, *A török Temesvár*. Élet és Tudomány 67 (1992) 744–745. See also Petrovics, István, *Foreign Ethnic Groups in the Towns of Southern Hungary*. In: Derek Keene, Nagy, Balázs and Szende, Katalin (eds.), *Segregation-Integration-Assimilation. Religious and Ethnic Groups in the Medieval Towns of Central and Eastern Europe*. Historical Urban Studies Series. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.83–84.
14. Petrovics, István, *The Fading glory of a former royal seat: the case of medieval Temesvár*. In: Nagy, Balázs and Sebök, Marcell (eds.), *The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways*. Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak. Budapest: CEU Press, 1999. 534.
15. Slavery was widespread in the Ottoman Empire. It was a complex institution which had many forms and which combined elements of different—pre-Islamic, Islamic Near Eastern, classical Mediterranean and conventional Ottoman—origins, and it remained legal in many parts of the Ottoman Empire until the end of the nineteenth century. The most intensive use of slaves was to be observed between the mid-fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, i.e. at the height of Ottoman power. When the Ottomans were in a state of military dominance, slaves were obtained through the conquest of different, mostly European territories. Tens of thousands of men, women, and children were captured and brought to market in a single military campaign. In contrast with the earlier period, in the later centuries commerce rather than warfare accounted for the bulk of slave imports. The ownership of slaves seems to have remained in Ottoman history one of the most consistent markers of high social standing. Male and female slaves served their masters in virtually every capacity: they worked, among others, as guards, porters, field hands, miners, masons, concubines, weavers, secretaries, entertainers and galley slaves. A large number of slaves were freed by their owners either during the master’s

lifetime or in testamentary declarations upon the the owner's death. For slavery in the Ottoman Empire see Madeleine C. Zilfi "Slavery" in: *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, *op. cit.*, 530–533. For a special form of slavery as it flourished in the Habsburg-Ottoman borderlands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see Dávid, Géza and Fodor, Pál (eds.) *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders (Early Fifteenth–Early Eighteenth Centuries)*, Leiden: Brill, 2007.

16. Lajos Tardy, who translated and published George's account, assumes that George was born around 1422 in Romosz (German: Rumes, Romanian: Romos), a village located about 12 kms from Szászváros (German: Broos, Romanian: Orăștie). See Tardy, Lajos, *Georgius de Hungaria – a "Szászsebesi Névtelen": Ertekezés a törökök szokásairól, viszonyairól és gonoszágáról 1438–1458*. In: Idem, *Rabok, követek, kalmárok az Oszmán Birodalomról*. Budapest: Gondolat:1977, 49. Romosz was destroyed by the Ottomans in 1438.
17. George's account was translated from Latin into Hungarian by Lajos Tardy. See footnote nr. 16. For the account's critical edition see *Georgius de Hungaria, Tractatus de moribus, condicionibus et nequitia Turcorum. Traktat über die Sitten, die Lebensverhältnisse und die Arglist der Türken*, edited and translated by Reinhard Klockow (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, 1993), *Schriften zur Landeskunde Siebenbürgens*, vol. 15. The most important works dealing with George's account are: A. B. Palmer, *Fr. Georgius de Hungaria, O.P., and the Tractatus de moribus, condicionibus et nequitia Turcorum*, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 34 (1951–1952) 44–68; Albrecht Classen, *The World of the Turks Described by an Eye-Witness: Georgius de Hungaria's Dialectical Discourse on the Foreign World of the Ottoman Empire*, *Journal of Early Modern History* 7, nos. 3–4 (2003) 257–279; Albrecht Classen, *Life writing as a slave in Turkish hands: Georgius of Hungary's reflections about his existence in the Turkish world*, *Neohelicon* 39 (2012) no. 1, pp. 55–72. Classen listed further bibliography on George. See also Nora Berend, *Violence as Identity: Christians and Muslims in Hungary in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*, *Austrian History Yearbook* 44 (2013) 5–9.
18. Istanbul and Cairo, the largest cities of the Ottoman Empire operated the most significant end-destination markets dealing in slaves, although smaller centres like Tunis, Algiers and Mecca were also heavy consumers. See Madeleine C. Zilfi "Slavery" in: *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, *op. cit.*, 531.
19. Crete (Greek: Κρήτη, Kṛíti, Latin and Italian: Candia) situated in the eastern Mediterranean, where it lies at the southern edge of the Aegean sea, is the largest and most populous of the Greek islands, and the fifth-largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, after Sicily, Sardinia, Cyprus, and Corsica. For a thousand years it had been the seat of the Minoan civilization. Subsequently, Crete was ruled by various ancient Greek entities, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Emirate of Crete, the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire. Until the Fourth Crusade (1204) it remained a Byzantine possession when it passed first to Boniface of Montferrat and then to Venice, which bought it from him. The most significant settlement of medieval Crete was Candia (Latinized form of the Hellenic Khándax), medieval precursor of modern Heraklion/Iraklion, situated very close to the ruins of the palace of Knossos. Candia used to refer to the island of Crete as a whole, as well as, to the city alone. After the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in 1570, Crete was the only eastern Mediterranean island of any importance that remained in Venetian hands. Aside from the general desire to control as much territory as possible, Venetian possession of Crete was a particular problem for the Ottomans because it lay directly on the main sea lane that connected Istanbul, the imperial capital, to its important province of Egypt, which served as the breadbasket of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans finally conquered Crete in 1699. For Crete see Elias Kolovos, "Cretan War" and Molly Green "Crete" *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, *op. cit.*, 157–158. See also E. Kovács,

Peter, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán a 15. században*, in: Neumann, Tibor and Rácz, György eds., *Honoris causa. Tanulmányok Engel Pál tiszteletére*. Budapest–Piliscsaba: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kara, 2009, 109–113.

20. Benedict Himfi (of Egerszeg and Döbrönte), son of Paul Himfi, was a nobleman of outstanding importance in fourteenth-century Hungary. Between 1342 and 1362, he was to be found in the royal household (*aula*) as *aulae miles*, then he acted as castellan of several castles (e.g. Somló, Visegrád) and count of different counties (e.g. Szatmár, Máramaros, Ugocsa, Pozsony, Keve Krassó and Temes). Louis I occupied Vidin in Bulgaria in 1365 and appointed Benedict Himfi—first as a captain, then as a *banus* (ban)—there to administer the affairs of the newly created *Bulgarian banate of Vidin*. The jurisdiction of the *ban of Vidin* extended not only to Vidin, but also to those Hungarian castles which were located next to the banate of Vidin. These castles, among which Temesvár was perhaps the most significant, provided military protection for the banate of Vidin. This political arrangement proved to be merely temporary since the *banate of Vidin* ceased to exist in 1369. After 1369, the king transferred the authority of the former *ban of Vidin* to the *comes Temesiensis*, who thereby became one of the most powerful dignitaries of the realm. This explains why Himfi was to be found, from this time on, among the barons of the realm. In 1372–1373 Himfi was one of the commanders of the Hungarian army that fought in Italy against Venice. In 1376, he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The reason of Himfi's pilgrimage was, as the prominent Hungarian historian L. Bernát Kumorovitz thought, to find his daughter, Margaret, who had been kidnapped by the Ottomans. For Benedict Himfi see Engel, Pál "Himfi Benedek" in KMTL 263. See also Szovák, Kornél, *Meritorum apud Dominum fructus cumulatorum* ((*Megjegyzések a 14. századi főúri vallásosságához*), in: Tusor, Péter–Rihmer, Zoltán–Thoroczkay, Gábor, eds., *Festschrift in honour of Agnes R. Várkonyi on the occasion of her seventieth birthday*, Budapest: ELTE Bölcsészettudományi Kara, 1998, 79–87; Petrovics, *Urban development in the Danube–Tisa–Mureş Region*, *op.cit.* 391; Horváth, Richárd, *Bigámista volt-e Himfi Benedek bolgár bán?* (*Adalékok a Döbrentei Himfiék családi történetéhez*) 83 (2010) 116–118. For Himfi's pilgrimage see Csukovits, Enikő, *Középkori magyar zarándokok*. Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2003, 102–103, 108–109, 148, 152, 190–192; See also Cosmin Popa-Gorjanu, *Medieval Nobility in Central Europe: The Himfi Family*. PhD dissertation defended at the Department of Medieval Studies of The Central European University (Budapest, 2004).
21. The first Hungarian historian, who called attention to the lifestory of Margaret Himfi, was L. Bernát Kumorovitz, who claimed in his study, published in 1983, that Margaret was kidnapped by the Ottomans in 1375. See L. Bernát Kumorovitz, *I. Lajos királyunk 1375. évi havasalföldi hadjárata (és "török") háborúja*. Századok 117 (1983) 942–945. Pál Engel, in contrast with Kumorovitz, argues that Margaret Himfi was abducted by the Turks from Egerszeg (today Ierseg, Romania) during the late fourteenth-century Ottoman incursions to southern Hungary, most probably in 1391 or 1392. See Engel, Pál, *A török–magyar háborúk első évei (1389–1392)*, *Hadtörténeti Közlemények* 111 (1998) 561–563. Later research, almost exclusively, supported Engel's assertion, for the simple reason that Venetian sources, surviving from the early fifteenth century (1405, 1408) and informing us explicitly about Margaret Himfi, reveal that Margaret had two infant daughters at that time. In the light of the latter fact it is very unlikely that Margaret had been abducted from Hungary in 1375. It is equally important to note here that it is not at all probable, that anybody would look for Margaret after 30 years of her capture. And anyway, who would be able to recognize her after so many years? See E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op.cit.*, 106.

22. Giorgio Darvasio made his will in Venice on 20 February 1413. His testament, with the exception of the introduction and the closing paragraph, which are in Latin, was written in Italian. Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Cancellerie Inferiore. Notai. Busta 1233, no. 282 and Busta 192, nos. 28 and 29. See E. Kovács, *Egy Magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 115, footnote no. 54.
23. For Marco Darvasio see E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 113–114. At an unknown time Marco Darvasio's wife, Ysbeta moved back to Venice. She made her will there on 6 November 1416. See E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 113.
24. In 1409, for instance, Giorgio Darvasio lent 400 golden ducats to Marin Ruzini. See E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 114.
25. On the basis of Darvasio's testament it may be assumed that a manumitted female slave of Tartar origin (Mary) and another slave (Mariza) also lived in Giorgio's house as his concubines. See E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 114.
26. Unfortunately, the surviving documents do not inform us of the circumstances in which Margaret was captured and taken to Crete. Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that Margaret was an attractive young woman who bore two girls, Marieta and Iacoba, to Giorgio Darvasio. See the charter issued by Voivode Nicholas Marcali and published by E. Kovács in his study. E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 120–121. It should be noted here, that Margaret was not the only Hungarian in Crete; we have information about several Hungarian female slaves who lived on this island in the Middle Ages. There is reference, for instance, in 1382, to an eight year old girl, named Anna. See Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe Médiévale*, vol. 2, (*Italie, Colonies italiennes du Levant, Levant latin – Empire byzantin*). Gent 1977. La Crète 805, 809. Cited by E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 107. See also *ibidem*, 111, footnote no. 36.
27. There is no information of the circumstances in which Nicholas Marcali was chosen as the person whose task was to find Margaret. Although he did not belong to the relatives of the Himfi family, he was a Hungarian baron who had a great reputation. Consequently, he had a greater chance to fulfil this task than a simple nobleman. Diplomatic mission or a pilgrimage to the Holy Land also may explain why he was entrusted with the quest. See E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 108. The terms of the agreement were preserved by the charter issued by Nicholas Marcali in 1405. (Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Miscellanea. Atti diplomatici e privati. Busta 31, no. 919.) The charter is published in E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 120–121.
28. Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Miscellanea. Atti diplomatici e privati. Busta 31, no. 940. The document is published in E. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 121–122.
29. Alternatively, it also may be assumed that somebody did indeed cheat Darvasio and Margaret, since they knew nobody—except Marcali—from Hungary. Kovács, *Egy magyar rabszolganó Krétán*, *op. cit.*, 116.
30. The activity of the Italians living in Hungary in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century focused primarily on large scale business. They established good and close relations with the royal court. Nevertheless, it is very conspicuous that only a few of them settled down permanently in Hungary. Those who did, lived mostly in Buda, where the king resided with his court, and where the Italians formed the elite of the local merchant community. Their houses stood in the Latin (present-day Országház) street. During the reign of Louis I, Italian financiers—among others—Jacopo Saraceno from Padua, Francesco Bernardi from Florence, Bartolommeo Guidon from Bologna administered the various revenues of the realm. In addition, they were engaged in various credit transactions. Their role and influence temporarily decreased after the accession of Sigismund of Luxemburg to the throne, when the

- rival Germans were able to acquire significant positions in the administration of the mines, the coinage and the thirtieth. The revolt of the wealthy burghers of Buda, which broke out in 1402 and enjoyed the support of the rich Italians, and which in some way must have been linked to the uprising of the barons against King Sigismund in 1403, further lessened the influence of the Italians. After the collapse of the revolt in 1403, King Sigismund ordered, as a punishment, the confiscation of the properties of the Italians. After a while, the Florentines—due to the merits and influence of Pipo of Ozora—were able to recover some of their lost positions, particularly in the field of financial administration. See Engel, *The realm of St Stephen*, *op. cit.*, 261–262. See also Prajda, Katalin, *The Florentine Scolari Family at the court of Sigismund of Luxemburg in Buda*, in *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010) 513–533.
31. Mályusz, Elemér–Borsa, Iván–C. Tóth, Norbert et alii, *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár*, 12 vols, (1387–1425), Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó–Magyar Országos Levéltár–Archívum, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, 1951–2013, vol. 2, part 2, no. 6407. Mályusz did not publish the document *in extenso*. He gave, instead, only a short summary. E. Kovács remarked that, on the basis of the registration-number recorded by Mályusz, he had been unable to find the original copy of Bernardi's letter in the Venetian Archives.
 32. It is not clear why Margaret settled down in Buda, since the Himfi family had landed estates in other parts of the realm. Although Nicholas Marcali, her main supporter, had owned a house in Buda, it seems to have been confiscated by King Sigismund due to Marcali's participation in the revolt against the monarch in 1403. See *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, part 1, no. 2520. The Italian community living in Buda and the presence of the royal court might provide a plausible explanation for Margaret's choosing Buda as a—temporary or final—place of habitation. Finally, it also may be assumed that a member of the Himfi family owned a house in Buda and Margaret lived there. Documentary evidence proves, for instance, that Benedict Himfi owned a plot and a house in Buda. It is true, however, that Benedict left this plot to his wife in his will in 1376 with the intention that Dorothea should pay his debts with the help of it. See Végh, András, *Buda város középkori helyrajza*, 2 vols, Budapest: Budapesti Történeti Múzeum, 2006–2008, vol. 2, nos. 52, 60, 67.
 33. Bernardi's contention is rather astonishing and contradicts Marcali's former activity. The only explanation Bernardi gives in order to support his opinion is a generalization: Marcali is "... *umgaro vere memte...* "
 34. "El suo padre fo grande mio signore e amicho e resto ad aure da luy piu di fiorini CC doro." *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, part 2, no. 6407.
 35. For the sake of curiosity, two particular cases is to be referred to here. In 1489 King Matthias informed the papal envoy that the sister of his grandmother had earlier been captured by the Turks, joined the sultan's harem and had borne him a son. It is highly probable that the sultan in question was Mehmet I. This would mean that Mehmed II was King Matthias' second cousin. See Kubinyi, András, *Matthias rex*. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008, 9–10. See also Gyöngyössi, Márton, "Egy vér folyik ereinkben" *Ki volt II. Mehmed szultán édesanyja?*, *Turul* 87 (2014) no. 1, 14–19. The other is the case of a Hungarian renegade whose story is recounted by Bertrandon de la Brocquière, a Burgundian pilgrim to the Middle East. Brocquière on his return to Burgundy in 1433 traversed the Balkans and Hungary. He wrote: „*We saw there [in the town of Krusevac – I.P.] a beautiful woman, one of the Hungarian nobility, whose situation inspired us with pity. An Hungarian renegade, one of the lowest rank, had carried her off in an excursion, and treated her as his wife. On seeing us, she melted into tears, for she had not as yet renounced her religion.*” The travels of Bertrandon de la Brocquiere... to Palestine, and his return from Jerusalem overland to France, during the years 1432 and 1433. Extracted and put into modern French from a manuscript in the National Library at Paris, and pub-

lished by M. Le Grand d'Aussy, translated by Thomas Johnes. Hafod: James Henderson, 1807. 273.

36. Let it suffice here to refer to only two examples. Palatine Leusták of Jolsva was captured by the Ottomans during the battle of Nicopolis in 1396. Since his family was unable to pay for him the ransom of 50, 000 florins, he died in captivity. In 1415 a Hungarian army led, among others, by Paul Csupor, ban of Slavonia, John Garai, the palatine's brother and John Maróti, suffered a heavy defeat in Bosnia at the hands of Hrvoje and his Turkish allies. Paul Csupor was executed, while the others were ransomed for 65, 000 florins, a sum that had to be raised by imposing an extraordinary tax in the realm in 1416. See Csukovits, Enikő, *Miraculous escapes from Ottoman captivity*, in: Dávid and Fodor, *Ransom slavery*, *op. cit.* 3–18.

Abstract

From Slavery to Freedom: the Fate of Margaret Himfi

After the overwhelming Turkish victory at Nicopolis in 1396, Temesvár/Timișoara and the region around it became the permanent target of Ottoman onslaughts. It was basically the task of the count of Temes/Timiș, i.e. the baron holding the office of *comes Temesiensis*, to establish an effective defence in this area against the Turks. Margaret Himfi was the daughter of Benedict Himfi, ban of Vidin and count of Temes. Although the time when she was captured by the Ottomans is still debated, and there are unexplored periods in her life, the last years of her captivity, with the help of newly discovered documentary evidence, can be elucidated relatively well. Margaret was able to return to Hungary, but her life in Buda, the medieval capital of the realm, proved to be very difficult.

The paper, through the fate of a noble woman, discusses the fortification of the southern parts of the Kingdom of Hungary, as well as the difficulties women had to face in slavery and, if they were lucky enough, in their new life upon their return to the “Christian world”.

Keywords

Middle Ages, Southern Hungary, Ottoman incursions, slavery, female slavery.