

The Lives, Legends and Memories of an Athlete and of his Age

Few saints, with 'pro-' or 'anti-crusader' merits, have emerged on East-Central European level (late 1300'-mid 1500'). In fact, their number is down to three. Each one of them was canonized centuries after their deeds. One of them was the 1456 'partner' of our *Fortissimus athleta Christi*, John Capestran (Giovanni da Capestrano). The *athlete* soon became the object of local 'worship', of 'unofficial sainthood' [eloquently portrayed by Péter Szabó's pages in the present volume]. His *Christian* image and credit turned into national admiration, as well as 'national selfishness'. He became the object of both 'trans-national' respect and personalized national pantheons [Paul Philippi, Loránd Mády or myself have focused on these personal and collective features]. This significantly influenced any perspective on the rise of common and popular *lancho*, who had left for Italy together with his king in order to make his fortune, to the mighty *gubernator Ioannes* and the god-like *Christian* warrior lord *Janus vaivoda*.

The 1400' witnessed the actual East-Central and South-East European re-birth of the crusade, turned into the 'later crusades', by which the regional Ottoman menace was turned into a matter of 'international' debates and efforts, usually under the scope of a papacy, still weakened by the Great Schism of the West [Venice's political conduct, enlightened by the study of Michela Dal Borgo on the 1460', is highly relevant for the twists and turns of the 'free Christian world' in front of the Ottoman Empire]. The Ottoman expansion posed a challenge similar and yet substantial different from that experienced over the last century and a half from the Mongol, Tartar power. More than in the late 1200', Church union, controversial in nature and difficult to enact, was drawn up as a common, not only Roman, solution to the threat of the *Infidels*. The union of Florence (1439), largely shaped crusader efforts for decades to come [in this respect, I also take the liberty of announcing that our 2009 *Between Worlds* series of conferences will be devoted to this topic, of the utmost importance until the present day].

This union did not last. The 'burden' of the *four points*, imposed by the Roman papacy, proved to be too hard for many major Christian *Greek* rite figures, otherwise, willing to various degrees, to accept, out of anti-Ottoman need first of all, the union. It proved especially hard for the *Greek* rite commoners, namely those to the North-East and South-East, of the fading *Byzantine Commonwealth*, who, like their elites, felt increasingly the need for a revival of their states and cultures [Ioan-Vasile Leb's lecture in this volume focuses on such a peculiar case]. The symbol of a great civilization stood on the brink of collapse and its only hope seemed to come from some of the most unlikely, in terms of pure beliefs and classical perspectives, areas and layers of society. But, at least in theory one of the perhaps greatest achievements of this union of Florence was the diminishment, through compromise, endangered by radical stands on both Christian sides, of the differences between the fighters for the common Christian cause [Iulian-Mihai Damian's case study can be quoted as a major example for these evolutions].

John (Iancu, Ioan, János) Hunyadi became the symbol of this Christian struggle, with all of its qualities and flaws, with its successes and great failures, an immortal symbol imposed largely by an immortal battle, which came and ended at the most untimely moment for him [Alexandru Simon's review of his final years reveals his political journey from hero to failure and back to apotheosis]. Still, he had already made his mark upon Christendom, Latin and Greek, reaching far beyond the borders of his beloved Hungarian realm, to the extent that he was viewed, by Greeks, as the new emperor of Byzantium, as the restorer of the City of Constantine [facts well portrayed by Dan Ioan Mureşan in his work on Hungary and Byzantium in its final hours]. It is thus interesting to note how often and how greatly the importance and attention given to his Christian historical image surpassed the one rendered to his local equally historical images. Several aspects of his rise and career were therefore viewed as the result of unique chances.

Aside from Hunyadi's personal valor, his life and the age which turned it into a success owed very little to chance and hazard. "Planning" and "evolving" were the key-words 'even' in those days, from the smallest details to the greater efforts [we draw therefore the attention to the studies of Tudor Sălăgean and Antal Lukács, which focus on these two 'extremes']. The rise of the low-born Walachian from the southern parts of the Hungarian realm was made possible by the long reign of Sigismund (Zsigmond) of Luxemburg, which, due to domestic unrests and to the growing Ottoman threat, brought a significant change of attitude in terms of royal politics towards the 'minorities' of the realm and towards potential 'non-Catholic' partners of the crown [our 2007 conference in the same series focused on this long underrated reign which changed, if not greatly influenced, the late medieval fate of this part of the European continent]. By 1430, the eastern military power of the realm officially consisted, almost in pre-Angevin fashion, of a conglomerate of *Saxones, Siculi, Nobiles et Valachi partium Transilvanarum cum potentia*. The Hungarian political path opened itself in front of the son of royal knight Voicu [for these matters, we draw the attention to the documents and interpretations discussed in Ioan Drăgan's study].

We can only speculate, as some later legends did, on what Hunyadi's career would have been like had Sigismund not died in 1437. Unrest and rivalry caught up with Hungarian politics and soon civil war irrupted. Its importance for the great rise of Hunyadi can not be undervalued. It return, it is worth noting how, from this early stages of his career as a high-ranking official of the realm, he should attention to what is sometimes viewed as historical details of lesser importance [his relation with the cities and towns of the kingdom, discussed, by means of case studies, by András Kiss, István Petrovics and Andrea Fara, provides us with valuable perspective not only on the politician, but on the man Hunyadi was]. These were calculated moves, opening his way to local supports, estates and tax-revenues, which he collected and gathered with great care and eagerness as well [part of his complex mechanisms can be understood through Zolt Simon's financial analysis]. It is consequently understandable why much discontent and despise was caused amongst the traditional elites or dynasties in East-Central Europe by the acts of the basically illiterate John Hunyadi, who made upon in action what he lacked in noble genes.

For a few years, Hungary became the *domnium Blanchum*, Hunyadi's 'personal estate', a fact and a perspective to which he held on even after his time as governor abruptly ended. When he died, he former actions turned against his family, while his Christian image played in the favor of his surviving heirs [both aspects can be seen in the studies of Enikő Rűsz-Fogarasi and Ovidiu Mureşan devoted to the ladies in Hunyadi's family, respectively to the importance of his humanist image]. His fortune, made by means, both unorthodox and common for the age, and his crusader 'icon' secured the election of his youngest son as king of Hungary. Pious and brutal as any 'respectable' medieval great political figure, Hunyadi was victorious in death and faith [in this respect, Maria Makó Lupescu' work greatly reveals the Latin need for reformation, supported by Hunyadi and which eventually supported him]. Past the sound of the bells ringing in honor of the 'miracle of Belgrade' (Beograd, Nándorfehérvár), Hunyadi's amour continued to shine.

As in medieval times, we often fill in the blanks according much to our own personal and local perspective and knowledge [Vladimir Agrigoroaie's analysis of the 1445 'crusader story' marks precisely this problem]. Several data on Hunyadi's time can still be found in western archives and libraries, but local data, edited or unedited, unused or forgotten, should not be omitted. The variable impact and various aspects of Hunyadi's career still call for extensive studies, not only because they are 'the link' between the changes brought by Sigismund and the 'modern features' of the reign of John's son, Matthias (Matia, Mátyás), but because they significantly define the way in which we perceive a medieval heritage often turned into modern European present [I turn the reader's attention to our conferences of 2004 and 2008 devoted namely to son Matthias]. In many aspects, Hunyadi's life and career did not end at Zemun.