The Ideology of György Dózsa’s Peasant War*

Preliminary Notes on Sources

In what terms is it justified to speak of ideology in the context of peasant uprisings? If the notion of ideology is defined (in the way it frequently is) as being a theoretically homogeneous body of views and ideas related to the social and political conditions upon which it intends to exercise a direct repercussion, this definition does not in all its particulars fit the programs of peasant movements. However, it is hard to make definitions conform neatly to historical reality. In truth, “ideological” elements of this kind—a set of idea-driven notions, value judgments and demands aimed at transforming society and the sphere of politics—can be found in all peasant movements, some of which are more or less shared between movements, next to others that are completely unique. Yet on the whole, as well as in all their manifestations, despite all their fragmentariness and structural looseness, these ideological elements form characteristic ideational structures whose main body may justifiably be called an ideology.

It is all the more justified to speak of ideology when the apparent fragmentariness is due primarily to limitations in source data and knowledge, while on the other hand, the qualifier of “instinctive” that is so often stereotypically tagged on to peasant movements derives mainly from the mode of perception. However, in all their tragic frailty, despite objectives either unreal or markedly

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* This is a translation of Jenő Szűcs’s essay “Dózsa paraszthárójának ideológiája” [The ideology of György Dózsa’s peasant war], Valóság 15, no. 11 (1972): 12–39; completed with footnotes that the editors of this volume have taken from the slightly different text of the German version of the article: “Die Ideologie des Bauernkrieges,” in Jenő Szűcs, Nation und Geschichte: Studien (Budapest, 1981), 329–78.
illusory, there is a good deal more of a conscious (i.e., ideological, in the sense above) nature to peasant movements than is generally considered to be the case. A reliable reconstruction depends, of course, on the extent to which we are able to enter such a movement’s particular notional system and ideological mechanisms, and this is methodologically contingent on a whole series of fundamental groundwork. General source analysis (including unraveling links between texts, and interconnections in conceptual history) is part of this work, as well as a source-critical approach, especially as it follows from the nature of these movements that there are, in general, relatively few written texts directly and authentically reflecting their program: there are, for instance, in the case of the Hungarian peasant uprising of 1514 just four written items to represent the “self-made literature” of the insurgents. In all further instances, the information provided can only be reliably projected back onto the reality by correcting the characteristic angle of distortion source by source, or source group by source group. The cases of “pseudo sources,” where such a correction is no longer possible, should be excluded. Last but not least, a precondition for such examination is the precise chronological assignment of the major motifs and episodes from the point of view of the history of ideas, as the internal logic of the events is itself, in a certain sense, a “source.”

It is no accident that these methodological aspects should crop up even in an introductory note. In investigating the way Dózsa’s image has evolved over the last four-and-a-half centuries it has been customary to take almost only changes in approach into account. Though important, it is not the sole historiographic approach, especially where the result consisted in registering such evident facts that the basic position of modern-day historians (to say nothing of writers and visual artists) in their judgment of 1514 was determined by their relationship to the idea of feudalism in terms of historical theory, and in present-day terms, to the idea of revolution in general. It is by no means of secondary importance what coordinates are used to determine an assessment’s possible room for maneuver, for not even the best of intentions can rectify poor bibliographic “points of coordination” that are either faulty or not methodically marked out. Though valid in general, it is all the more true of Hungarian historiography, that if the “positivist” or “liberal” era of writing history on a certain subject failed to carry out certain basic operations, or performed them imperfectly, a series of unchecked assertions were passed down to the present. As far as research into Dózsa is concerned, Hungarian historiography has undoubtedly been fortunate with Sándor Márki, inasmuch as his preliminary
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studies, preparing his monograph, published after 1883, were followed by his book, *Dósa György*, in which he managed, on the basis of an impressive body of source data, to reach a kind of synthesis in a process that had already commenced some decades earlier, during the so-called Reform era with Mihály Horváth and others, aimed at emancipating the assessments of the peasant war from the fetters of a feudal viewpoint. This good fortune was not without its faults, however, not only in that—as it has been customary to note—the extent of this emancipation was limited by the approach of the liberal bourgeoisie, but also because Márki’s methodological facilities fell well short of his relatively modern viewpoint. To this day the only scientific monographer of the peasant war, Márki was barely acquainted with the requirements of a critical appraisal of sources, and his endeavors were chiefly concentrated on finding some way of “reconciling” data from diverse sources of highly divergent value. As a result, he left a whole string of unfounded identifications and chronological conclusions to posterity, which have had unchecked repercussions in history writing itself ever since, for one thing, and served with canonical status as the germ of literary delusions, for another. One of the chief omissions was a failure to even attempt an assessment of the value of the first literary accounts of the peasant war as a source, to clarify, in other words, the question: to what extent the tales written by a row of sixteenth-century humanist writers, from Taurinus (1480?–1519) to Miklós Istvánffy (1538–1615), can in any sense be regarded as sources, and to what extent do their suggestions cover the historical reality emerging from other—primary—sources?

Research since then, of course, has made great strides in uncovering the economic and social causes for the uprising as well as the history of the ideas behind it. To refer only to the latter, the fundamentally important investigations of Tibor Kardos’s recent monograph on Hungarian humanism, and, on the heels of preparatory studies in 1952 and 1956, György Székely’s study on the ideology of Dózsa’s peasant war, have advanced our knowledge by unearthing previously unknown data, new standpoints and connections, and thereby, quite understandably, fresh debatable or open questions have been brought to the fore,

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1 Sándor Márki, *Dósa György* (Budapest, 1913).
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above all in regard to the fount of the ideas that went into the ideology of the uprising. Yet even these investigations did not touch on what might be called the “infrastructural” aspects that were previously adumbrated. Márki’s conclusions in that respect have, for the most part, remained intact, and indeed—to mention only one that touches most directly on the subject—his reference to “Dózsa’s speeches” found in a group of sixteenth-century humanists (Taurinus, Tubero, and Johannes Michaelis Brutus), albeit with critical reservations, have remained important sources for the history of ideas behind the uprising and, furthermore, in the context in which they had been placed by Sándor Márki (“Speech at Cegléd”).

In this vein, if it is held true that the internal logic of events is itself a source, care must be taken not to let authenticated and fictitious elements get mixed up in the course of reconstruction, nor is it a matter of secondary importance exactly where a motif which is of interest from the point of view of the history of an idea belongs—temporally and spatially—because to grasp the relevant turns in the historical turmoil depends largely on this. Put differently, not even an investigation into the history of ideas can do without answers to a much more fundamental question in the writing of history: “wie es eigentlich gewesen ist”—what actually happened and how did it in fact happen?”

It is commonly held that historical knowledge is an issue of “quantitative” nature: the more new data come to light, the broader the database, the closer historical reality—almost automatically—can be found. The matter is far from being this simple however, as sources are exceedingly varied in a qualitative sense—i.e., where their value is concerned. Often “new data” will only increase the confusion at first sight, intensifying contradictions, and if, instead of analyzing the reasons for those contradictions a method of “bridging” them is opted for, far from getting closer to the truth it becomes even further removed. Research on Dózsa in the decades around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century found itself in this predicament.

A rapid glance at the source base on the peasant war, at least in its broad outlines, cannot be avoided. For a long time, up until the middle of the nineteenth century, the main basis of knowledge on Dózsa’s peasant war, or at least its “guiding thread,” was the History of Hungarian Matters by Miklós Istvánffy. Indeed, an account more neatly rounded, more coherent, and more indicative is not to be found among texts that may in any sense be considered sources, than the one written in the final years of the sixteenth century by this historian called “the
Hungarian Livy.” However, he was the last in a line of historians begun by the Moravian-German Taurinus—Stephan Stieröchsel—who started his “heroic epic” about the peasant war, the *Stauromachia, id est cruciatorum servile bellum*, in the court of Archbishop Tamás Bakóczi, and completed it in the course of 1518–19 at Gyulafehérvár (Hermannstadt in German, Alba Iulia in Romanian) in Transylvania. He was the only Hungarian humanist who could possibly have been an eyewitness, had he not happened to have been far away, in Vienna, during the fateful weeks towards the end of May and June. He was nevertheless in a position to write up most of the immediate and authentic body of facts, though rather than expanding his sketchy knowledge of what had happened, most of his aspirations were exhausted in stringing on to it a series of borrowings from a dozen or more humanist authors and writers from antiquity, starting with Lucan’s *Pharsalia* (*Bellum Civile*), and wallowing in the snobbery of mediocre copycat humanist poets, shrouding events in a murky fog instead of dedicating himself to *historiae veritas*. The more sober-minded and critical Ludovicus Tubero (Ludovicus Cervinus; 1459–1527) of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) was only able to reconstruct events from secondhand information in the 1520s, which is all the more the case with Paulus (Giovio) Iovius (1483–1552), who probably inserted the history of the Hungarian peasant uprising into his world history not much later, and even more so with the wandering Venetian humanist, Johannes Michaelis Brutus (Gianmichele Bruto; 1517–1592), who, after a three-year stay in Transylvania, followed his master and patron, István Báthori, to Poland and there, having few original reports on which to rely, he committed to paper, around 1580, his all the wordier disquisition about the events of 1514. Mikkós Istvánffy set down his account even later, about eight decades after the events in question, and having few original reports on which to rely, drew his own unquestionably fluent, readable, and well-edited account partly from his humanist antecedents, partly from elements of oral tradition, even, here and there, using actual documents.

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4 Mikkós Istvánffy’s *Historiarum de rebus Ungaricis libri XXXIV* (Cologne, 1622) was written around the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but not published until 1620 in Cologne; it was first published in Hungarian translation in 1867–68 as *Magyarország története 1490–1606* [History of Hungary, 1490–1606], 2 vols.
5 István Taurinus (Stieröchsel), *Stauromachia, id est cruciatorum servile bellum* (Vienna, 1519); new ed. László Juhász (Budapest, 1944).
6 Ludovicus Tubero, *Commentaria suorum temporum* (Ragusa, 1784).
7 Paulus (Giovio) Iovius, *Historiarum sui temporis libri XLV* (Florence, 1550–52).
9 Istvánffy, *Historiarum de rebus Ungaricis*. 
This group of humanist historians is not homogeneous, of course, but they are a united group in as much as they all formed their secondary assessments into a rounded whole from the remove of a certain time lapse, whether years or decades, and as time progressed learning from each other, and at the same time striving to outdo each other. For they are also united by their ideals concerning the way history should be written: none of them content with communicating facts; indeed, it was not so much the “facts,” but the task of “editing” or “compiling” which set their quills going, with the objective to discern the mainsprings behind events, their connections and causal relationships, even where they had very little in the way of source documentation to rely upon.

They are, furthermore, raised retrospectively to the status of a group by the circumstance that for a long time—in certain respects, to this very day—their suggestions left the most vivid impression on the common knowledge of history in Hungary. A factor in this is that the texts of most of the writers in question have been published either as selected passages, or in their totality, in translations ranging from poor to excellent, in a series of editions by László Geréb,10 let it be added, with highly ambivalent results. For much as these editions have been successful, indubitably bringing people closer to the problematic aspects of 1514, they have also rendered these aspects equally precarious. What matters here is not just, or even primarily, the frequent inaccuracy of the translations and the sometimes completely incomprehensible whimsicality of the selection of the chosen extracts, but, first and foremost, the total lack of a reliable outline as to their value as sources, of critical notes and objective explanations (and at the same time, the superficial exiguousness of the way the writers are presented), which, taken together, come to an almost biblical suggestion: Ecce! “Written in this book” you find the true history of 1514 . . . (A further problem is the unprofessional, naïve endeavor by which the publications have aspired to coerce individual humanists into what is called a series of “progressive traditions,” above all the servilely anti-peasant Taurinus, who was mediocre in the extreme, both as editor and in the standard of his poetry.)

Yet, this popular group of humanist writers, while not lacking completely in value as sources, comes at the very bottom of the value-hierarchy of sources. The groups of sources preceding these humanists will now be considered in a likewise succinct form. Following the written memoirs that come down from the

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insurgents themselves (though as mentioned earlier, this is restricted to a mere four documents) the scale of value comes out roughly as follows:

(1) private letters, communications, and ambassadorial dispatches which arose concurrently with the events (i.e., during the course of May to August 1514) whose authors were, to a greater or lesser extent, placed outside the fundamental zones of tension (ethnic German burghers or foreigners, Italian diplomats and ecclesiastics, the king of Hungary’s Bohemian courtiers), the writings themselves giving a report at a definite point in time about immediate experiences or current news, primarily for information purposes and in a language (German, Italian, or Czech, with a single exception) which does not have the obligatory formalism of Latin;

(2) ordinances and letters originating from secular and ecclesiastical government (the royal and archiepiscopal chancelleries, powerful lords, counties, certain feudal dignitaries) and municipal authorities in the period from May to August (that is, still during the unfolding of events) which, for all their hostile prejudice, having as yet no suspicions of the consequences, and being conceived in an “hour of need” and likewise at a precisely definable point in time, reflect the momentary state of affairs;

(3) legal records (formal instruments, interrogations of witnesses, etc.) which may have originated months or years after the collapse of the peasant rebellion, while the information they carry can reliably be projected back to one or another aspect of the developments. Set against this bundle of altogether around one hundred documents, to be considered jointly (because individually, of course, they are like the tesserae of a mosaic), is a much thinner and more well-defined group of sources that it is customary to call “narrative sources”—since individually they do, indeed, survey the entire process of the uprising in a more coherent, more “narrative” manner (though originating as they do after the event and from uneven bases of information, they are exposed to a greater risk of tradition-oriented distortion and spurious editorial intervention than the previous three groups)—which itself can be clearly divided into three further subgroups;

(4) records in the shape of memoirs, which may possibly have been committed to paper two or three decades later, but written by persons who personally lived through the events and whose primary goal was not the shaping and arranging of a “literary” account (they were not capable of doing so), but to record their firsthand recollections. The value of the three sources falling into this subgroup is not reduced but rather increased (in spite of obvious errors on points of detail) by their naïve directness and at times uncouth, even “barbarian” style,
not least the circumstance that they recorded their recollections from three “provincial aspects” quite independently of one another, indeed having lived through the events in three separate regions of the country. György Szerémi (c. 1490–after 1548) was chaplain in the town of Gyula at the point in time when he experienced the peasant war. What lends special value to his memoir in this case is precisely its subjective bias, its virtually unreserved affirmation of the peasants’ cause, because through this his turns of phrase, his scale of values, his conceptual structure complements the figuration that may be extracted from the writings of crusaders. The events were contemplated from Syrmia by an unidentified Hungarian-speaking chronicler mentioned by Antal Verancsics (Antonius Verantius; 1504–1573), and from Buda by a similarly simple, anonymous clergyman who probably belonged to Archbishop Bakócz’s entourage (whose jottings are in a codex which is preserved in Vienna).

(5) Foreign contemporaries who were in possession of direct oral communications, and under no particular constraint to order their accounts either chronologically or conceptually, set down what they had heard in 1515, while it was still fresh in their minds—such as Johannes Spiessheimer (Cuspinianus, 1473–1529) and Riccardus Bartholinus, the Italian secretary to the bishop of Gurk (in contrast, the simple literary paraphrase made at the end of the year 1514 by Ianus Vitalis Panormitanus of a contemporaneous German handbill or “newsheet” [belonging to Group 1] has no self-standing value as a source)—or else they preserved information from sources whose credence is of the first rank but are no longer themselves extant, such as the on-the-spot May–June ambassadorial reports by Antonio Surriano, Venetian envoy to Buda, or the no later work by the Venetian Daniele Barbaro (and probably, indirectly, also Iovius).

Last of all comes the previously mentioned line of humanists from Taurinus to Istvánffy belonging to Group 6, who can only partly be regarded as actual “sources”; they are better seen as the first historiographers of the peasant war. (Other chronicles from the sixteenth and seventeenth century have no value at all as independent sources.)

Going on to survey how the picture of Dózsa evolves in the modern age more closely, considering the viewpoint of the sources on which it is based, it can be said, in short, that up until the latter half of the nineteenth century very little of the first four groups was known (and the fifth only partially), which meant that

it was the sixth group almost exclusively which served as the basis for the historical overview with, as mentioned, the “Hungarian Livy,” Istvánffy providing the guiding thread. The ratio only started to alter in favor of the earlier groups with the publication of source documents in the decades around the turn of the century, and significantly as a result in particular of Sándor Márki’s own researches.\footnote{Márki, Dósa György.} Curiously, however, when Márki was acting as a monographer he was unwilling to notice that on many cardinal issues the combined testimony of the first five groups was decidedly at odds with the suggestions of the sixth group he was espousing; he saw his task, never acknowledging the distinctions and scales of values of the various groups of sources, as being one of smoothing out the contradictions that showed up even here, by artificial combinations and haphazard estimations, all at the cost of no little logical confusion. Since his own summing up (in 1913) there has been no significant expansion of the array of basic sources, nor any specifically critical analyses of sources, so that in regard to “the events” the “coordinates” combined by Márki remained valid; anything of any value that has since come into being relates to domains beyond these coordinates.

However, more recently the ratios have changed yet again, and significantly at that. As a result of two decades of collecting work, Antal Fekete Nagy raised the size of Groups 1–3 to around seventy-five texts; starting from this raw material, a manuscript of the complete archive on the peasant war is now ready and awaiting publication under the editorship of Géza Érszegi and colleagues. Not long ago, I had the good fortune of participating in the editing work for this publication, and later becoming a copy editor.\footnote{Antonius Fekete Nagy, Victor Kenéz, Ladislaus Solymosi, and Geisa Érszegi, eds., Monumenta rusticorum in Hungaria rebellium, anno MDXIV (Budapest, 1979).} Notwithstanding that, it must be reiterated that a body of data in itself, almost as a matter of course, solves nothing; it is still only raw material, an agglomeration of texts, which on first encounter raises further questions, or indeed, one contradiction after another. Still, the exceptionally fortuitous opportunity that the complete (at least as things stand at the moment) core of primary sources on a subject area had been brought together, prompted me to embark on a systematic critique of the sources, drawing in the whole legacy of sources (including Groups 4–6), and an attempt to untangle the snarled-up threads. This was also stimulated by the fact that as the blind luck of research would have it, quite unrelated to any of the above events, in a hitherto unknown codex (in a Franciscan epistolary that had...
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been produced not much later than 1515) I came across a group of writings which gave a key with respect to the heretofore murky antecedents of the outbreak of the uprising. As a result of the analysis, the contours that emerged in ever so many respects when examining precisely the critical weeks of the uprising’s incipience were first and foremost the stages by which a given element of reality started to split apart from the direct information of the primary sources (Groups 1–3), where the spatial and temporal distinctions were still clear, and as early as late 1514 and in the course of 1515 would be established as a mere “motif,” independent of time and place (some parts of Group 5), but meanwhile, in spite of all the obscuration, how the true internal links were preserved with contemporaneous eyewitnesses (Group 4), until eventually, between 1580 and 1600, the aforementioned humanists (Group 6) gradually rearranged the elements into a new kind of “system” in which, due to the characteristic distortions of tradition striving for a “rational” explanation, and a marked desire to dramatize—aiming for unity of time, place, and action—the disintegrated motifs were fitted together again into what was undoubtedly a rounded and suggestive, yet historically utterly false overall picture.

Even modern historiography has not managed to extricate itself from the suggestive influence of these narratives; indeed, Sándor Márki has made matters worse through his aforementioned “harmonizing” efforts, as he basically squeezed the often authentic sources into shaping the raw material for an essentially fictitious epic, authenticating it with the authority of a modern-day historian in the process. Let it suffice to cite just two examples. Few episodes in Hungarian history have imprinted themselves as firmly, even in a pictorial sense, as that of Dózsa departing from under Pest at the head of a rebellious army some time after May 15, 1514, and going on to “proclaim a popular uprising” in a “speech” in the Cegléd market. It will no doubt come as a surprise that this has no foundation (however weak) in the sources, apart from an identification which has not been properly thought through, and a seductive analogy—that moved Márki as well—that Kossuth also proclaimed the popular uprising of 1848 in Cegléd! Or can a better-known figure in the Hungarian historical imagination be found than that of “Lőrinc Mészáros, priest of Cegléd” who, leaving Pest on Dózsa’s side, became the very embodiment of revolutionary radicalism? Yet, we are actually dealing with a syncretic figure here, assembled from two (and possibly three) real historical personages; besides which neither Lőrinc Mészáros, a preacher for the crusade in the area around the town of Szikszó in Northeastern Hungary, nor the legendary priest named Lőrinc, supposed to
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have joined Dózsa’s army in the area of Békés and Gyula, were by Dózsa’s side in the camp at Pest. Let this suffice for now by way of examples, because what matters is that after many decades, the most important source on the uprising, a call to arms to be found in a single extant copy of the original in the archives of Bártfa (Bardejov)—bearing no date—issued in the name of György (Dózsa) Székely ex Cegléd (commonly referred to as Dózsa’s “Cegléd manifesto”), fitted in such a self-explanatory way into a sequence of events unverified by source data—and indeed, contradictory to all known authentic sources—that subjecting the date, circumstances, and context of its genesis to genuine scrutiny seemed superfluous. Yet, while precisely this form of examination may force us to surrender a few of our popular conditionings in regard to history, it would at the same time be enriching to be able to reconstruct the dynamics of 1514 in the process of its gradual evolution—even in respect of its ideological mechanism.

Naturally, the present study is not the place to give more than a preliminary and rough synopsis of a far more ample and comprehensive disentanglement, which, suitably documented, belongs to the pages of a specialist journal.

The Beginnings of the Peasant War Enveloped in the Crusader Army

The Hungarian Peasant War of 1514 belongs to a group of peasant uprisings in Central and Eastern Europe in which the Turkish question and the eruption of social tensions are linked not merely by the internal and external constraints of the situation, but also in that precisely the characteristic intertwining of these factors supply the foundations for their ideological superstructure.14

Hungary’s 1514 is not isolated, lacking precedents or parallels. In all affected countries, the expansion of Turkish power brought to the surface not merely the weaknesses (at times the frank breakdowns) of the feudal military machinery, but exposed the internal contradictions of the whole social and political structure with elemental force, rendering it into a sensitive reality. To some extent the

14 Based on the documentation assembled in the Monumenta rusticorum, an up-to-date monograph was written by Gábor Barta and Antal Fekete Nagy, Parasztháború 1514-ben [The peasant war in 1514] (Budapest, 1973). They have corrected several mistaken combinations by Sándor Márki which essentially modified the “coordinates” of the history of the Peasant War. I am grateful for the possibility to consult this book still in manuscript. With a critical evaluation of the entire documentation and with the consideration of additional, hitherto unknown source material, I could strengthen the observations of Fekete Nagy and Barta and, partly modifying them, reach also new conclusions. [More recent historical treatment of the 1514 Peasant War was assembled in a 500th anniversary conference in 2014: Revolt, Violence and Memory: Peasant Uprisings in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe].
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idealistic scheme of the medieval world order had always been a fiction in insisting that a higher, divine dispensation had allotted social functions among the praying clergy (oratores), the combatant nobility (bellatores), and the laboring masses (laboratores), but by this time it not only became an undeniable fact that this system was functioning badly, but to worse effect, any “moral” justification for the social existence and privileges of the aristocracy and nobility based on the labor of their serfs came to be shamelessly disregarded, because they would cower in their castles and country houses in critical situations, and the brunt of the role of bellator, the warrior, had to be borne by the serfs. Moral outrage opened the floodgates to a whole mass of accumulated social grievances and discontent. An eyewitness record at Buda states that on May 25, 1514, the day after an attempt to disperse the peasant crusader army, the seething common people in the streets were shouting things like: “Since when have the lords and nobility been arming (against the Turks)? Nigh on twenty years! It’s all (everything happening here) villainy!” This mob, as can be learned from a letter dated May 26, streamed into the crusader army stationed by Pest with the idea: “they seek to help each other mutually, to fight together against the nobility.” Decades earlier, in the 1470s, developments by the same logic would lead, in the provinces of inner Austria, first to the setting up of peasant self-defense communities, and later to local peasant assemblies and alliances, and finally to a general peasant uprising (1478). What is specific to 1514 in Hungary is that the peasant war was fomented in a crusader army that had been proclaimed by papal bull and was originally organized by the ecclesiastical and secular governments in the guise of an anti-Turkish enterprise from which, as a matter of course, the nobility were lacking from the very start; from the very outset the recruiting priests and monks sought to have red crosses sewn onto the chests only of serfs in their thousands. Nor was that phenomenon without its precedents. Let it suffice here to refer to a precedent, to be dealt with elsewhere, that a 20,000–30,000-strong crusader army of exactly the same composition had already once—with the defense of Belgrade by John Hunyadi’s forces on July 23, 1456—almost entirely anticipated the outcome of 1514.15 What was striking in Dózsa’s peasant war

15 Jenő Szűcs discussed these precedents in a separate study: Jenő Szűcs, “A ferences obszervancia és az 1514. évi parasztháború (Egy kődex tanúsága)” [Franciscan Observance and the 1514 Peasant War (The testimony of a codex)], Levéltári Közlemények 43 (1972) 213–63. The results of this were integrated in the German version of the present study: Szűcs, Nation und Geschichte, 332–41, and in a greater detail in “Die oppositionelle Strömung der Franziskaner im Hintergrund des Bauernkrieges und der Reformation in Ungarn,” in Études historiques hongroises, 1985 publiées à l’occasion du XVIe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques par la Comité Nationale des Historiens Hongrois (Budapest, 1985), 483–513.
even in relation to Europe, however, is that it consummated in a more determined, radical and, it may be said, more consistent form than earlier movements of the same type observed elsewhere.

Not that this was its only particular feature. If by way of comparison some near-contemporaneous peasant movements are considered, and the half-century of local preparations—reaching back to the 1470s—for the 1525 Great Peasants’ War of Germany first and foremost, for all the common or analogous features two singular aspects of the Hungarian peasant war must be highlighted and explained in their uniqueness unless they are to be relegated among the mysteries of history.

One of these aspects is the astonishing temporal velocity and equally temporal parallelism by which developments in May 1514 shot to a boiling point essentially simultaneously within the course of two to three weeks, and also spread from one region to another, and thereby acquired their ideological justification just as rapidly. This phenomenon is striking and calls for explanation, because there is not a single basis in the source literature to suggest that in Hungary the peasant war was preceded by any organizational or ideological forerunner comparable to the case in Germany—a series of local associations, “Bunds” or “Twelve Articles”—covering over half a century.

The second aspect worth considering is the circumstance that the ideological character of the Hungarian peasant uprising cannot be classified under either of the two prototypes exhibited by the near-contemporaneous movements. The tenets of these latter, inasmuch as they were socially radical—that is, they rejected the feudal order in its entirety—was generally profoundly permeated by a chiliastic mysticism and asceticism and thereby attained “proto-communist” principles such as, for example, the demand for common ownership, a community of goods. However, inasmuch as the movements themselves were socially moderate (that is, they stayed with a program of a sort of “regulated” feudalism) their “more realistic” nature found expression in their demands barely going beyond the alleviation of burdens and the restoration of “ancient customs.” The reason why the Hungarian peasant war of 1514 occupies an individual position in the series of European peasant wars from an ideological point of view is that within the short space of three weeks its ideological shift transcended the notion of a “regulated” feudalism and reached the idea of a radical reshaping of the entire social order in a manner such that the leitmotif was not mysticism (although unsurprisingly here too certain chiliastic features played a part) and, to the best of our knowledge, the principle of a community of goods was not even
mooted; equally, the relatively “realistic” nature of the program which emerged was specifically not embodied in “articles” or demands for the alleviation or abolition of certain feudal burdens.

This calls for explanation all the more in that, given the past history and position of Hungarian serfs, there was no foundation or possibility for them to start off from concepts of a “peasant order” such as those that provided institutional bases or outlines in certain German and Austrian provinces from which examples or a starting point could be drawn. Nor was there any trace in Hungary of an active social critique within circles of the urban burghers that would have prepared the ground; not only are antecedents of the “Bundschiub” type, or the “Armer Konrad” (“poor Conrad”) type of farmer organizations lacking, but so are reform programs of the “Reformatio Sigismundi” type. It is also questionable to what extent traditions of the 1437 peasant uprising in Transylvania, which comes into the reckoning as a direct precursor, can be taken account of as such, given that the programs of 1437 and 1514 are so different, and that Transylvania per se joined the peasant war at a fairly late stage, and only as a subsidiary theater of war.

Certain ideological antecedents and sources from the end of the fifteenth century onward do, of course, come into account, and research in recent years has begun to map them. Before all else, the dormant Hussite traditions, now even perhaps enjoying a revival, as well as the social critique within the official Church (documented by György Székely),16 especially the branch inclined to spiritualism (analyzed by Tibor Kardos)17 deserve attention, calling for a closer study as to the extent to which, and in what proportions these factors (and possibly others, which have hitherto not been taken into account) asserted themselves in the specific situation of 1514.

The course taken by events in Belgrade during the summer of 1456 conceal by no means insignificant lessons for assessing all the above. Although they cannot be detailed here due to constraints of space, it is not unwarranted to recall one or two episodes. Then, as in 1514 (as we shall see), the task of preaching the crusade and recruitment fell largely to the stricter (Observant) branch of the Franciscans, specifically in part to some who are known by name, and in part to the small army of Hungarian friars who hid anonymously behind what—as a result of subsequent hagiographic sedulousness—became the hugely inflated fig-

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The text for the rousing words of encouragement was chosen largely from the books of the Old Testament, with the crusader army, the *populus cruce signatus*, gaining its mission on the analogy of the “chosen people,” the *populus Israel*; as regards the basic tone, let it suffice to quote from one of the sermons, delivered on July 22: “God has chosen the weak, the poor, and the fallen of the world to confound and disperse the mighty...” The dualism characterizing the relationship between the crusader army and the “mighty” Turks may indeed have virtually transposed itself into a social dimension. Or a line of thought in one of Capistrano’s sermons as summarized by him in a letter to cardinal Capranica might be quoted:

> Your servant beheld a great strife in the heavens between the Sun and Moon and the stars. The Moon and the stars, attacking the Sun, gained victory. Dazed and astonished, I was dumbfounded, not understanding what this might betoken. The Sun defeated by the Moon: God’s mysterious judgment! Almost paralyzed, I gave up all hope... it was then that the *vox spiritualis* spoke within me: God’s decisions are unfathomable! I again reviewed the matter, and I came to the conclusion that: the mightier shall serve the lesser, and the end is nigh (*major serviet minori et finis properat*)!19

Whatever may have been the intention, whatever lay at the back of this interpretation, the final words of this mysticism, abounding in “visions” as they do, lean towards a familiar range of ideas: towards an eschatological realm of thinking in which, with the proximity of the end of the world and the millennial rule of the

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20 Capistrano’s letter was preserved in the memoir of Nicolaus de Fara written around 1462: *Vita davissimi viri fratris Joannis de Capistrano*, c. XIII (Buda, 1523), 34. The sermon was delivered still before the Belgrade events, on August 24, 1455, in Székesfehérvár.
“lesser,” that is, the poor (minores) being transplanted from monastic mysticism into the chiliastic expectations of the plebeian movements of the late Middle Ages, in which the roots of the ideology of many a peasant uprising of this era can be found. Crusader peasants may have heard, now in the name of the cross, trains of thought of this nature from camp priests, much as they had heard them from Hussite preachers two decades earlier at secret gatherings in the depths of forests; the notion of divine “election” recalled with uncanny accuracy the heretic idea of the “election” of the populus Dei, a central article of faith of the Hussites in Southern Hungary. On the day following the victory of Belgrade, on July 23, 1456, as can be learned from eyewitness accounts, the peasant crusaders “declared that the victory God had given them the previous day was not the work of some barons from Hungary.” Turmoil (turbatio) was fomented, with some of those who were present “having been roused by this, prepared to march against the rebels.” At this, the very same day, Hunyadi and Capistrano urgently disbanded the army; had they not done so, as a contemporary commentator puts it, “they would have killed many crusaders.” As far as ideological influences are concerned, it is worth taking note of a curious paradox which sprang, in point of fact, from the internal constraint and logic of the situation: the same intellectual milieu transmits “legitimate” ideological arguments in the name of the cross specifically, that led to the eruption of social tension and formulation of heretical trains of thought, whose primary function would have consisted in overcoming them.

April–May 1514 is most distinctly reminiscent of that July day in 1456 recounted above, even in the sense that a range of ideas that revolved around crusading per se were, so to say, already present in “ready-made” form. The question superseding all the others, therefore, is when and where the uprising began to mature enveloped in the crusader war? Already the portrayal of this historical moment common today is a belated product of artificial combinations, including the circumstances and chronology of events leading to the camp at Pest being picked up, as well as the central element of declaration of the “manifesto” of the uprising in Cegléd.

In brief summary of what the primary and authentic sources attest: Pope Leo X’s bull was proclaimed by Archbishop Bakócz on April 9, 1514, in Buda. At first it had little success, because by the time he appointed György Székely
(Dózsa) as commander on April 24, there were as yet only a few hundred men in arms. Following this, however, the crusaders suddenly began to gather at greater speed. By May 8 (as reported by a hitherto unknown letter written on this day), in a fortnight, 15,000 peasants had gathered in the camp by Pest. Sources for these dates do not in the least intimate, however, any form of agitation or unrest, though as many as three completely independent reports about the news at Buda have remained extant for May 8–13. Each still reflects unequivocally on preparations for a military crusade. Not even the king’s decrees of May 15, announced in Buda, can be pinned to any manner of uprising. And yet in Esztergom, on this very day of May 15, Archbishop Bakócz unexpectedly suspended the call for the crusade and any further recruitment due to the latest news reports and growing complaints of the nobility according to which overbearing and bogus preachers of the crusade “with sacrilegious impudence and malign audacity” were recruiting people “in various regions of the kingdom” (in diversis regni . . . partibus), and conducting all sorts of “assemblies” at which they incited to the denial of services and taxes, and indeed, obedience to their superiors in general—overall general rebellion, seditio, was brewing in effect, attacks against the manor houses of noblemen had already started.23

Not a word about Dózsa either in this edict or in a series of reports from Buda a week and a half later (anywhere at all in the capital before early June) can be found, and understandably so, because by then Dózsa and the main army were a long way away, beyond the Tisza, and well out of the purview of the inhabitants of Buda. According to a report by Szerémi—the sole authoritative contemporary and eyewitness (since he experienced the events in residence)—Archbishop Bakócz’s first, earlier mentioned, ordinance of May 15, banning the raising of recruits, reached Dózsa in Békés (almost 200km/125 miles) from Buda.24 All other circumstances indicate that Dózsa had set off from Pest with his 10,000-strong main army as early as May 9–10 (leaving 5,000 behind in the camp), under a forced march; even as smaller groups of recruits assembling in the provinces had to be picked up, he advanced on his own roundabout way through the trans-Tisza region, originally and up to that point still undoubtedly against the Turks. The exact circumstances under which camp was struck are not entirely clear, but it seems very likely that news concerning Turkish military operations in Croatia, which reached Buda on May 8, played a role. The original

23 This important document is being published only now. Municipal Archive Košice, Suppl. H. 30 (Mon.).
24 Barta and Fekete Nagy, Parasztháború, 75–76; Szűcs, “A ferences obszervancia,” 239.
intention was probably that the crusader army form the central column of a three-pronged troop movement, with Péter Beriszló, Ban of Croatia, on the right wing, as he was at this time moving southward with “gathered forces of the country” through Transdanubia in Western Hungary, and János Szapolyai, Voivode of Transylvania on the left wing, already pushing ahead past the lower reaches of the Danube. It is, in essence, possible to reconstruct even the stations at which, and under the impact of what experiences, anger against the nobility mounted virtually step by step in the main army and its leader.25 None of this can be dwelt on in any detail here; let it suffice to note that the first station was Mezőtúr, followed by Békés, then Gyula. But all this took place after mid-May, and past the eastern bank of the Tisza, so spatially also at a fair distance from the popularly cited Cegléd! By that time, Dózsa did indeed have a Father Lőrinc by his side, who had joined him somewhere in the region of Békés or Gyula. What is more, he had in all probability joined along with around 2,000 peasants who had shortly before, on May 22, fought the nobles at Várad (Grosswardein in German, Oradea in Romanian) in the first armed engagement of this peasant war. Even a later military operation carried out at Apátfalva may have belonged to the push against the Turks, only for the subsequent defeat (on May 26–27) to finally redirect the main army to making war on the nobility.

All this emerges unambiguously from the first five groups of sources outlined in the introduction, each supplementing the others in the information it provides, and it is only in the retrospective rehashing of actions typical of the humanist writers in Group 6 that a new kind of “scheme” is confronted: fragments of traditions and motifs of the events of three weeks—with Dózsa’s conversion (as well as, in Istvánffy’s narrative, the figure of Father Lőrinc)—blur into events at Pest, which related to the remnant army that had been left there after the final withdrawal of the call for the crusade on May 24, and the entire complex amalgamating in “dramatized” fashion at Pest before Dózsa sets off. Yet even in this version of the epic no shred of a basis for a “declaration of peasant war in Cegléd” can be found. Dózsa’s “speech” is made either before they have set out (i.e., near Pest) or else due to the illogical editing (of Taurinus), at best a guess may be risked: he refers to a “second speech,” purportedly by Dózsa, made while he was still near Pest, or else at the confluence of the Tisza and the Danube (though in reality Dózsa never visited the place). However strange it

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25 The most decisive witness to this is Chaplain György Szerémi who observed the events from nearby: Georgii Sirmiensis, Epistola de perditione regni Hungarorum, 58–62.
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may seem, the sole foundation for this traditional vision is that Sándor Márki, without any reflection, placed the order handed down in Cegléd (but bearing no date), and customarily referred to as the “Cegléd manifesto,” into the sequence of events as if it were self-evident, without so much as raising the issue of the flagrant contradiction in which its gist stands with respect to developments emerging plainly from all of the primary sources. Without the slightest mention of the Turks, the order calls upon people to take up arms against the nobility and, indeed, already condenses within itself the program of the entire conduct of the peasant war and its ideological foundation. The cardinal question from the point of view of the topic under discussion here is the following: did the ideology of the peasant war pop up like a “deus ex machina” at the very outset, or did it evolve through several stages? As will soon be shown, this important document did not originate at this point in time, but later, under quite different circumstances, and only then came to be proclaimed at Cegléd.

In other words, for numerous reasons not to be touched on here, it is necessary to break with the simple static notion that a single leader “began to organize the popular uprising” (Márki). Matters advanced towards their final outcome in a far more complex manner. Even Dózsa himself drifted almost step by step over the best part of three weeks to reach the point at which he did indeed become leader of the peasant war. Every authentic source and circumstance indicates that the uprising began to ferment not in the camp by Pest, nor even in the main body of the army, but “in the countryside,” indeed in diversis regni partibus, earliest of all. All this happened if not in the first week of May, then the second week at the latest (when peace still reigned in Buda and Pest), at various gathering-places independently of each other and in parallel, until one can see around May 20 (with Dózsa as yet to take his decisive stand!) the emergence of the most important foci and centers where the crusader forces would de facto embark (without any central “manifesto”) on the peasant war.

On the basis of sources, it is possible to outline four regions where events can also be pinpointed in temporal terms with adequate certainty. These places should be noted, because they bear significance for what follows. The first is the region of Abaúj and Zemplén counties, with Szikszó at one pole (along with the neighboring villages of Megyaszó and Aszaló, from which the people who issued

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27 Márki, Dósa György, 172.
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the earliest crusader document came) and Sárospatak at the other. As can be learned from the archbishop’s letter from the center in Szikszó, already in mid-May “virtually the whole county has turned to revolt.” The second is the borderline area of Békés and Bihar counties, with the town of Gyula at one pole (people fleeing from the peasants had moved to its castle at the beginning of May), and the town of Várad, where the first major clash between peasants and the nobility took place on May 22, at the other. The third is the area around Csanád, with the bishop fleeing no later than around May 20. The fourth and last region is made up of Bodrog and Bács counties (the more southerly part of which is the Danube-Tisza interfluve), where hosts of insurgent peasants were likewise ubiquitous in keeping a watch on the roads around this time.

As to whether there is any connection between these seemingly scattered gathering-places of crusaders—which were, for the time being, all independent of the main body of the army under Dózsa—it depends on whether anything new can be said about the hitherto obscure question of the proclamation of the crusade and the organization of recruitment. The codex mentioned in the preamble does offer new insights, because contemporaneous copies of pertaining documents are collected in it. In order to draw inferences, one naturally has to go back to April. After April 9, Archbishop Bakócz proclaimed the bull in Buda and in Pest by way of his own confidants and, simultaneously, had copies sent to several dioceses. For their part, however, the bishops had no relish for the crusade, and even in the center of the country, as seen earlier, the preparations proceeded falteringly. Bakócz’s confidants were chosen in part from his own milieu in Esztergom, and in part from among Italian clerics, and as can be read in a later archiepiscopal document, “they were exceedingly few.” Therefore, the archbishop chose to alter the framework after a certain time: the task of preaching the crusade and recruiting the army with regard to the whole territory of the country outside Buda and Pest (except Transylvania) was entrusted to the organization of the province of the Franciscan Observants, appointing Blásius Dézsi, the Vicar of the Order, as his specialis delegatus to attend to everything. Except for the initial words, the document of appointment itself, and even the date, are no longer extant, but several circumstances make it probable that it bore the same date as another in which the archbishop assigned the same functions with regard to the territory of Transylvania to Bishop Ferenc Várdy, his vice-legate,

29 O SzK. Cod. lat. 432. For the description of the manuscript and the circumstances of its creation see Szűcs, “A ferences obszervancia,” 218–34.
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namely April 25. What has survived, however, is an encyclical letter from Vicar Blasius Dézsi to the district superior, or guardian (custos), of each of the ten custodies (custodia) into which the vicariate of Hungary was divided, whereby he, by the authority invested in him, appointed them in turn as his subdelegates, ordering that they urgently entrust “every appropriate frater,” especially every guardian, “to toil with all ardor that this grace should come to the notice of every Christian believer as soon as possible.” There has also survived the text of the letter of commission (Ad bellum–predicatori) by which the guardians and subdelegates authorized the individual preachers of the crusade to proclaim and organize the “holy military campaign” (sancta expeditio), “to fire the souls of the faithful who are fighting in this campaign,” instructing them to join the commander of the expedition at a suitable point in time (in line with formulary custom, a letter N stands in the place of Dózsa’s name). Instead of the wearisome length of the full text of the papal bull there were summaries for public use and an instruction (instructorie) which, presumably, agreed again in large part with the known text sent to the bishop of Transylvania. In this way it becomes possible to understand the reference in a previously known letter of June 7 as to how the bull reached the Franciscan guardian of Várad, who then passed it on (in contravention of the rules, as it happens) to Transylvania.30

If the areas where the movements and rebellious “assemblies” of crusader peasants were first palpably present are now recalled, one cannot help but notice the intriguing circumstance that the foci and poles of turbulence everywhere coincide with the site of an important monastery of the vicariate of the Observant Franciscans. At one end of Abaúj-Zemplén district, near Szikszó, was the monastery of (Abaúj)-Szántó, and the Sárospatak monastery at the other; in Békés and Bihar counties there was, on the one hand, the monastery at Gyula and the one at Várad on the other; further to the south was Csanád monastery; ultimately, with a chain of Observant monasteries stretching along the Danube from Kölyüd (Kolut, Serbia) to Futak (Futog, Serbia) and Kabol (Kovilj, Serbia) (here are, location by location, the areas where recruitment for the 1456 crusade took place), with the (Szerém)újlak (Ilok, Croatia) custodia in the more southerly reaches of the Danube-Tisza interfluve.

That there are links can hardly be called into doubt, even if, to begin with and in and of themselves they attest to no more than the sole organization in

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Hungary at the time, which could be mobilized countrywide for such a task, and could meet with perhaps unsuspected success in drumming up the peasant masses over a period of two to three weeks, from the end of April to mid-May. Because it is also true that just as he had entrusted the Observant Franciscans with organizing the recruitment of the army, Archbishop Bakócz subsequently charged them with general dispersal, having definitively withdrawn the bull on May 24. That this had been the course of events in Buda and Pest was already known; but now an order by Vicar Blasius Dézsi appointing a commissioner to quell the disorders has come into our possession. Nor is the context in which this appointment is being entertained without interest, for, to start with, the commissioner is enjoined if he notices any sign of malice against the Order, “above all on the part of the Conventual friars,” that they were to be resisted in any way possible.31 Knowing the strained relations harbored by the two branches into which the Franciscan Order had split in 1446, a moderate trend (Conventuals) and those who adhered strictly to the Rule (Observants), there can be no doubt where the explanation for the organic link between these two matters lies: the former grabbed at the opportunity to hit out at the latter—it is plain to see, they were the cause of the present disorders.

And in fact, however unintentionally, the cause they were. The question may however be raised though: was it in fact all that unwilled? In the years directly preceding the peasant war, serious internal wrangling and crises had become manifest among the Observant Franciscans.32 The text of an encyclical letter of encouragement (exhortationes) has survived from the spring of 1512 of the type that was generally sent out annually to all the chapters in a vicariate to be read out in the monasteries. In this particular letter, the vicar at the time, Gábor Pécsváradi, alludes in grave terms to “scandalous” and scandal-mongering members of the Order, “sin-infected” (scelerati), who had gained ground in the Order’s Hungarian province, and of whom the Order had already rid itself, yet whose baneful example was continuing to spread. “It pains me,” the letter reads, “that very many friars, their life being corrupted, stray scandalously and incur damnation, imagining they may permit themselves suchlike and even baser things as they see (the aforementioned) sinful friars practicing, and the danger is ever greater that many, deviating from the path of perfection and the virtues of the Order, debauched by the scandalous example of these conceited friars, either cast

32 Szűcs, “Die oppositionelle Strömung der Franziskaner.”
off the habit of our holy Order altogether or deviate day by day from the path of salvation . . .” The problem was included in the agenda for the following year’s assembly of the Visegrád chapter (May 15, 1513), where severe punishments were adopted to counter “the causes of this scandal”; indeed, the most incorrigible and restive of the Order’s members were excluded from the monasteries. (It is a noteworthy fact that the same Imre Esztergomi who wrote the short account of the above episodes, was the guardian of the Abaújszántó cloister.)

One year later, as described, the task of recruiting crusaders fell upon this “scandal-laden” organization, and exactly a year to the day after the aforementioned event Archbishop Bakócz’s ordinance of May 15, 1514 gives peculiar weight to accentuating “apostates” and excommunicants (apostatas et excommunicatos) among the high-handed, “false and hostile” preachers of the crusade. However, leaping a further year ahead to the first meeting of the vicariate to be held since the peasant war (May 27, 1515), among the resolutions brought up, the first specific point after the stereotyped invocation of the Order’s virtues is: “let not a single friar dare to take up, or bestow or preach the cross without the permission of the vicar . . .” Then there follows a detailed and lengthy regulatory enactment of the procedure by which guilty friars are to be interrogated and punished; specifically, pursuant to Article 1514/48, which prescribed the visitation and punitive procedure to be used by prelates against clerics who had participated in the uprising (under normal circumstances, bishops had no say in the Order’s disciplinary proceedings). Meanwhile, in the codex in question, under the title Nota circa agenda, can be found a note as to how every “apostate” of the Order (apostatam nostrre religionis) should be arrested and thrown in jail; how the apostasy, after investigation, is to be reported to the vicar “in order that the like should no longer be allowed to roam on the loose, piling evil upon evil.”

It should be noted that internally, in such literature directed at simple friars, Franciscans always avoided mentioning “sins” and heresies by their exact name lest it thereby involuntarily popularize the views that were interdicted. From Oswald of Lasko, among others, it is also known exactly what “apostasy” denoted in the Franciscan conceptual vocabulary: heresy and suspected heretical views and behavior—an epithet earlier applied to Hussitism and later to the Reformation.

If we take stock of the ecclesiastics who took part in the peasant war, many secular clergymen are to be found, but they are all parsons simply leading a squad off to the Crusades from their village or market town. In comparison, three (possibly four) clerics who fought as captains at the head of larger military formations are known of. All had been friars, and it is known of one of
them, the captain of the troop from the county of Tolna, that he was a former friar (an capo, stato frate) who had already left his Order earlier as an “apostate”—which is not surprising if it is considered that both canon law and the regulations of the religious orders forbade participation as armed combatants; so anyone who fought and “killed,” and in an excommunicated enterprise at that, would be eo ipso an “apostate.” All the evidence of reliable facts and circumstances also point to the legendary Father Lőrinc himself being from the area around the town of Várad, if not from Várad itself (another preacher of the crusade, this one from the Sziksza area, bore the family name of Mészáros, whilst the designation “of Cegléd” makes an isolated appearance only very late in the day with Istvánffy, and might denote a place of origin just as well as being a mere retrospective insertion for identification purposes). Moreover, since Lőrinc is generally said to be a priest (e.g., Laurentius pap, Lorenzo pop), while in some places he is described as a friar, there is a reasonable ground for suspicion as to whether he may have been one of the Order’s “apostates,” and more particularly, from the very convent of Várad where—in light of what we know—the guardian had behaved “irregularly.”

With an overview of the links outlined above, Observant Franciscans’ social critique—which recent literature considers, if not in its totality and not with a uniform interpretation, as a potential ideological source of the peasant war—has quite a different ring to it. There is no question, however, that in the collection of exemplary sermons by Pelbart of Temesvár (c. 1440–1504) and Oswald of Lasko (c. 1450–1511), which were repeatedly printed after 1497 this critique had its own “demagogic” role in that it made the secular arm of the ruling class responsible exclusively (and indeed, to be more accurate, Oswald targeted the barons explicitly) for the “sins” committed. That, however, does little, on the one hand, to alter the fact that the facts of social oppression were unambiguously dissected and evaluated as “sin” in these speech samples, while on the hand—quite apparently—the results of propaganda campaigns in history have not always been aligned with their subjective goals. For in a certain sense in this case, it is truly possible to speak of mass propaganda. According to a hitherto unknown account, around 1514–1515, 1,700 friars lived in the seventy houses belonging to the vicariate of Hungary (specifically the province of the Observant branch, which had by then for decades been regarded as a de facto separate

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33 Szűcs, “A ferences obszervancia,” 149–54; the fact that Lőrinc must have been originally a friar in Várad was recognized by Barta and Fekete Nagy, Paraszthaború, 112.
Order), numbering nearly one-third of the total friar population for the whole of Europe north of the Alps!34 (It is not within the scope of the present article to analyze the manifold reasons accounting for the particular virulence of this movement in late medieval Hungary.)

Nor, equally, is it right to completely ignore a curious ambivalence which was the essence of Franciscan Observance: already back at its origin in the thirteenth century, the movement had been a spiritually motivated attempt at internal reform of the Franciscan Order (indeed of the Roman Catholic Church as a whole), yet at the same time the Church conducted itself as a militant defender of an authority which was not, fundamentally, of a spiritual kind. That contradiction became embodied within the movement itself over the course of the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries in ever-renewed struggles of “conservative” and “radical” spiritualism. It belongs to the natural history of Observance that heretical and quasi-heretical attitudes were constantly and simultaneously sprouting out of one and the same soil as such blatant representatives of the ecclesia militans (in certain respects they are reminiscent of the later Jesuits) as James of the Marches (Giacomo della Marca) and John of Capistrano, who both played a part in Hungarian history. If the known fact that, two to three decades after the peasant war, Franciscan Observance was the most combative among the early opponents of the Reformation, while also spawning the earliest and most combative reformers, be added to the picture, a closer understanding of the role of this important trend emerging around the uprising will become possible.

Let us take into account (in very abbreviated form) the most important elements of social critique which appeared almost dogmatically, as the result of protracted discussions, in the collections of model sermons of Pelbart of Temesvár and Oswald of Lasko (especially the latter), chiefly the items about Hungarian saints in Oswald of Lasko’s *Sermones de sanctis* [first published in 1497]:

1. Equality is man’s “natural condition” (*naturalis conditio*); inherently “it was not given to man that he should rule over men.”
2. God permitted rule in this world for various reasons; “nowadays, however” (it is intoned on repeated occasions) power is often nothing more than abuse and flouting of justice (*usurpatio*), because “force has become justice” and “the cause and justice of the poor (*causa et veritas pauperum*) are nowadays being trampled underfoot by ruthless judges.”
3. Nowadays subjects are crippled by unjust exactions (*iniustis exactionibus*), to

34 OSzK Cod. Lat. 432. f. 232–34. For a similar account that can be seen in this list of houses and convents dated to 1509, see Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, XV, 401–4.
wit, with unusually burdensome taxes, by withdrawing the right to free movement and testamentary disposition, by increasing the socage, by imposing the selling-off of wine and beer—burdens with which “the mighty harry their villeins against custom and practice (contra consuetudinem et illegitime).” (4) A lord who flouted his power in this sort of way is none other than “a thief and robber, and he shall be committing an eternal crime . . . subordinates are not obliged to obey and pay taxes (nec tali domino subditi tenentur obedire et solvere tributum).”

The original purpose of the sermons, of course, was to awaken the moral conscience of the ruling class. “Oh, ye highborn lords who prosper on the sweat of the poor, growing fat on the fasting and hunger of the poor, if ye shall not contritely abandon the injustices that have been listed . . . ye shall not behold the glorious countenance of the Lord!” addresses Oswald of Lasko the country’s dignitaries. But these model sermons, precepts, and trains of thought could also be employed by those who, “corrupted with sin,” turned against the order of the world and fell into the trap of “apostasy,” turning to the peasants. According to Archbishop Bakócz’s previously mentioned ordinance of May 15 (repeated on May 24), the apostate preachers of the crusade were agitating for a refusal of services to landlords (census dominorum temporalium), royal taxation (dica regie maiestatis), and other customary dues (alia consueta debita); indeed, “the refusal of obedience to superiors” (obedientiam superioribus denegare) generally. In one of his sermons (Sermones de sanctis, 50), Oswald of Lasko closes his speech with the dramatic proclamation of a moral lashing: “the oppressed poor cry out to the Lord to plead vengeance, and their outcry comes to the ears of the Lord, who had his prophet Micah say: ‘Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; is it not for you to know judgment? Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones. Who also eat the flesh of my people . . .’” When the year of vengeance came round, at the crusaders’ mutinous assemblies (conventicula) in the first fortnight of May 1514, the “apostates” even demanded that “the tax officials and the dictators be slain,” and here and there crusaders were already assailing the manor houses of the nobles, plundering their goods and putting them to the torch—one after the other the complaints of the nobles reached the court of the

35 I have analyzed Oswald of Lasko’s sermons in detail in my study: “Die oppositionelle Strömung der Franziskaner.”
36 The events are represented in a similar way in Bakócz’s ordinances of May 15 and 24; see also the Chapter Archive of the convent of Lélesz, Acta 1514/11 and MOL (Hungarian State Archives) DL 82.401; as well as Fekete Nagy, Kenéz, Solymosi, and Érszegi, eds., Monumenta rusticorum, 72–81.
archbishop of Esztergom. This was incidentally all done strictly under the sign of the cross; after all, it was also written by Oswald of Lasko that at the Last Judgment, a cross would mark the banners of the saved.

The texts can almost be superimposed. Nevertheless, nothing would be more one-sided than to “derive” the ideology of the peasant war on a “mono-factored” basis from the sermons of the Observant Franciscans; in what follows, attention will also be drawn to other elements. Still, the foregoing serves as a warning: there is no guarantee that in terms of influence, the monks’ social critique and “heresy,” at least where their outcome was concerned, can be precisely and clearly delineated, particularly when it comes to the “apostates” of the years 1512–1515 just discussed, who united both in their person.

The “Apostasy” of the Crusader Realm of Thought

In its inception, therefore, the peasant war was already brewing at assemblies of crusaders held at various points in the country during the first half of May; its seeds, in all certainty, were cast from the very first days of May—bearing in mind the speed at which news travelled in those days (a decree or item of news, for example, would take four or five days to pass from Buda to Szikszó)—and the circumstance that Archbishop Bakócz, given his attachment to the crusader expedition for well-known reasons of prestige, was obviously only prompted, by mounting complaints (indeed, accusations) and cogent reasons, to suspend it on May 15. The ordinance reflects a nationwide movement already decidedly in statu nascendi, at least in respect of the mutinous assemblies. (The May 24 ordinance of dispersal is, in respect of the reasons detailed and description of events, merely a reiteration of the earlier one, or if anything, even sketchier.) The earliest demands were at the start directed at refusing the burdens of seignorial and state taxes, and services in general, as well as at loosening feudal ties, and at eliminating the executive organs of seignorial and royal power. This does not, in itself, actually amount to an “ideology,” but is an elementary expression of general dissatisfaction accumulated over several centuries. The powers that be naturally tried to make it appear as if the common, innocent people were being wickedly “misled” by certain individuals (populus communis per iniquios seductores deceptus).

Since the assembling crusader companies were the hotbeds of dissatisfaction, and the words found for its expression were those of certain “apostate” preachers of the crusade, the circumstances defining the lines of force along which the ideology of the peasant war preeminently started to build up around
(i.e., the specific anti-feudal demands) were already given by the middle of May. It was no doubt no accident that the first stage of these developments did not involve the main body of Dózsa’s army, but palpably centered around Szikszó in Abaúj County, one of the previously mentioned foci. It is from this part of the country that the earliest piece of crusader writing stems, a proclamation by two crusader captains (principes cruciferorum), Tamás Kecskés and Lőrinc Mészáros, situated in the two neighboring villages of Aszaló and Megyaszó. The writing cannot be dated reliably (it survived in a mutilated copy with no dateline), but it may be supposed on the basis of various circumstances that it arose in the first half of May, and at the latest by the middle of the month.\(^3^7\)

The writing itself, which would pass through many hands, is formally no more than a sort of extract from a bull, a simplified edition or brief summary (summarium), indicating only the subject (itself significantly modified); at the same time, it was characteristic of what, in the archbishop’s ordinances, was referred to as a “high-handed” and “false” bull. This is indeed what it was, in part, because in general the ideology of the uprising was naturally rooted in the realm of crusader thinking.

Given that the full text of Leo X’s bull of September 3, 1513 is known,\(^3^8\) it provides an opportunity for instructive comparisons to be made. The crusader mode of thought at the time this bull appeared comprised fundamentally three interdependent elements. The first element embodies the nature and goal of the enterprise, and the matter of authority. Accordingly, the campaign was a “saintly undertaking” against Christianity’s “infidel” enemies, the Turks, proclaimed by the pope by virtue of the authority he had obtained from the Almighty; an authority which on this occasion he was devolving upon his legate, Archbishop Bakócz. The second element is the spiritual reward for participants; anyone who plays a part, whether in person or indirectly (through engaging the services of mercenaries) obtains absolution of all sins. The third element itemizes the sanctions that will be imposed on obstructers, inhibitors, or nuisances for the undertaking; their punishment, irrespective of social status or dignity, is excommunication.

\(^3^7\) Vilmos Frankl (Fraknói), “Adalékok az 1514-ik évi pörzlázadás történetéhez” [Data to the history of the Peasant War], Századok 6 (1872), 440. (Municipal Archive Košice, Suppl. H. 239: Mon.) The fact that this Lőrinc Mészáros is not identical with the Priest Lőrinc, Dózsa’s most important deputy leader, was observed by Barta and Fekete Nagy, Parasztháború, 112–13; for the birth of this writing see Szűcs, “A ferences obszervancia,” 142.

\(^3^8\) The entire text of the bull is published for the first time in Fekete Nagy, Kenéz, Solymosi, and Érszegi, eds., Monumenta rusticorum, 35–54, 60–65 (Arch. Segr. Vat., Reg. Vat. vol. 1006, f. 34–52). The summary from April 3, 1514, is in MOL DI 81390.
and everlasting damnation, from which only the pope may grant absolution.

Step by step, the ideologues of the 1514 uprising unfurled the thoughts behind its justification from these elements. The *summarium* of Kecskés and Mészáros is the first step, inasmuch as it does not, so far, break the triple structure, though it modifies each of the three elements in such a way that taken together they deviate from their original purport, and serve something completely different from what they stood for in their original manifestation.

Let it suffice here to restrict ourselves to the most important reinterpretations. As far as Element 1 is concerned, the nature and the goal are as yet completely identical with those of the bull, but there is now a major shift in terms of authority. True, in their introduction, the issuers of the *summarium* name the triad of pope, archbishop, and king, but these lines are left hanging in the air both grammatically and in terms of their content, because in what follows, they proclaim the principles in their own name (as *principes cruciferorum*) and, by avoiding the authority laid down in the bull, in such a way as to make the crusader army appear as an undertaking that has come about directly through the will of God (*ex voluntate omnipotentis Dei*).

In regard to Element 2, the matter rests on a number of smaller, but not insignificant modifications. For instance, a person who offers assistance of any kind—horse, cart, weapon, money—will win the same absolution of sins as an active participant (nothing is said about this in the bull), and this absolution will be valid forevermore, even for descendants (*sine fine in filio filiorum posterumque eorum*), which is wholly irregular and dogmatically absurd. Finally, the document finds it necessary to stress especially: “those who are poor, yet still offer assistance relative to their strength” shall obtain the same absolution (nothing is said about that either in the bull). As can be seen, an “irregular theology” begins to emerge in the guise of crusader thinking.

Even more important than this, however, is Element 3, the detailing of the sanctions with the excommunication of those who defy it “like a limb of the devil” (*tamquam membra dyabolī*), a formulation that as such is alien to the text of the bull, but is consonant with one of the formulations of the articles of faith issued by the Hungarian Hussites in the 1420s and 1430s, as recorded by James of the Marches.39 The foregoing culminates in the precept that if the collectors

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of money extort the money from the army unjustly (*iniuste*), “the whole assembly (*tota conventus eorum*) should rise up against them, and even if they should slay every last one of them, they should suffer no detriment”! Here the noteworthy feature is not just that the declaration of the legitimacy of vengeance on the part of the whole community is in sharp contrast to any dogmatic possibility, but even more that the emphasizing of the *questores* (by which all tax collectors, generically are to be understood) and of customs (*theloneum*) in the following point becomes noticeably detached from the specific situation and gains a more general sense. This is all the more the case in that in reality it would never enter the head of an official, however forceful, that there could be a pretext for a demand of any sort of “tax” on a crusader army, while customs-free delivery of food supplies was a prerequisite regulated in the bull. This is in fact about a denial of taxes and customs together with a legitimation of collective vengeance on the part of the community as a whole—still fully clothed in the guise of the crusader ideal and the legality this ensures—and, conjointly, a decided shift towards their generalization. The crusader ideal “legitimizes” the demands—direct and immune from transmissions—of the peasants of the “assemblies” referred to in Archbishop Bakócz’s ordinances!

It is a notable circumstance, furthermore, that even “plain speaking” is accompanied by particular rules distilled from crusader sanctions. It was seen earlier that the archbishop’s ordinance of May 15 already shows an awareness of the fact that mutinous assemblies were calling for the killing of landlords’ officials and royal tax collectors. On the other hand, the inflammatory apostates constructed a strange, “dogmatic” precept even in relation to this: anyone who “cast a stone or rock” at the killed “would receive an indulgence for one hundred days.” This is the point, then, at which one can discern the start of the transformation which points towards the next stage in the ideological shift: the entire internal structure of the crusader domain of thinking begins to shift and rearrange itself. Here Element 2, the spiritual reward, becomes the due of a person who attacks feudalism.

The phase of ideological construction reflected in Kecskés and Mészáros’s *summarium* might be called the “apostasy” of the crusader realm of thinking: the ideological structure in itself is still more or less intact, and even the Turks have not yet disappeared from the specification of the goal, but in reality, the modification of the most critical details, from authority to sanctions, serves to legitimize a peasant uprising.

Essentially the same stage is reflected by another crusader document from the same region: a letter, probably from late May, by an anonymous crusader
The "Apostasy" of the Crusader Realm of Thought

(belliger cruciferorum) from Sárospatak: the consciousness of "crusader brothers" who, acting as direct instruments of God and "the holy cross," profess and assert the justification for vengeance.⁴⁰

In contrast, a voice in several respects quite different sounds from a third piece of writing from the same region, a letter by Captain Ferenc Bagoly, dated May 31, sent from the village of Gönc.⁴¹ As already emphasized by earlier research,⁴² the prominent role given to regnum in the system of values is particularly striking here: the crusader army itself is the "kingdom’s" cause, and was gathering "at the will of the kingdom" and "in defense of the kingdom"; anyone who hindered this "rebelled against the kingdom." What comes to the fore here is not the counterbalancing of the ideological elements of fides and regnum in itself; that is, indeed, almost a natural, so to say, "official" formula. In the Franciscan vicar's encyclical to preachers, the aims of the "sacred host" appear in this form: pro religionis Christiane et presertim huius regni defensione.⁴³ The striking aspects of Ferenc Bagoly’s letter are, on the one hand, the internal proportions, with no less than seven references to regnum in the short letter, set in different contexts; on the other hand, the fact that in sharp contrast to other writings from crusaders, it is written in a simultaneously entirely moderate yet plaintive tone; and lastly, but most significantly, in respect of “authority” it does not share the concept which had already evolved by the middle of May. The short text also refers to the command or mandate given by the pope or the archbishop no less than four times, whereas despite the conflicting situation which prompted the letter, not a word is said about the prospect of any definite sanctions.

All this deserves noting, because it indicates that one should not suppose the ideology of the crusader forces to be some sort of homogeneous entity; one has to reckon with shades of belief. This particular letter is an important document for demonstrating that the element of regnum has to be reckoned with in the peasant scale of values early in the sixteenth century (according to the reply from Kassa (Košice, Slovakia), Bagoly was a providus (serf), so undoubtedly not a captain stemming from the petty nobility). On the other hand, even knowing what subsequent developments were, it has to be considered a decidedly extreme

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⁴⁰ Frankl (Fraknói), Adalékok, 442–43 (Archivum Civitatis Cassoviae, Suppl. H. 199), see Fekete Nagy, Kenéz, Solymosi, and Érszegi, eds., Monumenta rusticorum, 96.
⁴³ OSzK Cod. lat. 432, f. 92.
variant, not at all “typical” of the mainstream of the evolution of the crusader ideal into the revolutionary ideology of a peasant movement. This kind of basic ideological position did not recur either at the time or later on, either in direct sources or indirect pieces of information. For lack of data, it can no longer be established whether there is any link between the letter’s unique position and the fact that all crusader activity in the direct neighborhood of Kassa ceased at the beginning of June (i.e., this part of the army dispersed pursuant to the May 24 order by Church and “kingdom”), whereas insurgent crusader peasants were still taking up arms in Kecskés and Mészáros’s presumed district, the area around Szikszó, for instance, as late as around June 21.

Dózsa’s Volte-Face and the Genesis of the “Cegléd Manifesto”

Let us turn our attention to the main body of the army under Dózsa’s command. The mounting dissatisfaction in the army being mobilized against the Turks, accumulating ever since Mezőtúr—and in the meantime grown to number something like 30,000 men—reached fever pitch in the area of Gyula, when news arrived that an advance party had been routed at Apátfalva by the combined forces of Count István Báthori of Temes, Miklós Csáky, bishop of Csanád, and the county nobility, with some of the crusaders drowning in the River Maros. Dózsa set off during the night to surprise the nobles by assailing them and vanquishing them at Nagylak (Nădlac, Romania). Spectacular impalements that were effectuated later the same day marked the true declaration of a peasant war on Dózsa’s part. The impalements at Nagylak, as will be seen, have their own symbolism: in this first demonstrative manifestation, the impalements are nothing but a display of vengeance, a direct response to the fact that, before mid-May, the lords dragged the leaders of a crusader formation from Mezőtúr to Buda and impaled them.

A radical turning point: May 28 at Nagylak, a town by the River Maros.44 The army had already been joined a while before by Ambrus of Túrkeve, “enthused to the point of fury” (furibundus)—as György Szerémi puts it—who had completed studies in theology with distinction at Cracow. Also present by then was Father Lőrinc, with regard to whose role the core of Istvánffy’s characterization can be accepted as authentic, only it should be set back in time and place to the tradition from which the figure originated: the end of May and the area of the

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44 The significance of this turnover was emphasized by Barta and Fekete Nagy, Parasztháború, 80 ff.
Maros. News of all sorts of “elections” trickling back to Buda in distorted forms after May 31\(^{45}\) also have some foundation in reality: from that point onwards, the army regarded itself as a community, which had cut all organizational ties with the official crusader expedition and was endowed with its own particular internal goal. Nevertheless, it was the ideal of continuity that also served to express discontinuity. Cut off from the authority of the papal bull and the archbishop, the new authority is clarified: as we know from Szerémi, Father Ambrus *dedit auctoritatem sibi consecrandi gentem ad sanctam crucem* (where the context and the mediocrity of the author’s knowledge of Latin leaves some uncertainty over who the *sibi* refers to, though most likely it is intended to mean he “gave himself the authority for the rededication of the army”).\(^{46}\) The central ideological element of the order for battle issued in Cegléd to be discussed further on had evolved by this point: “the blessed folk of the crusaders” (*benedicta gens cruciferorum*) had come to be called on, the concept of an elected army fulfilling a divine mission and consecrated by its own priests, at the very moment developments also moved in this direction, as we have just seen, in far-off Abaúj.

Historiography, up until now, has not been clear enough about what has perceptibly come to light from more recent sources: how the methodically and strategically sound concept of such an indeed nationwide peasant war emerged in the Maros area between the victory at Nagylak and the occupation of Lippa (Lipova, Romania) between May 28 and June 6. Everything was decided in that one week. After Dózsa had given up the campaign against the Turks and indeed declare war on the Hungarian nobility, he could by no means be seen as some sort of a “lay” peasant leader who set himself at the head of an army of serfs to lead them blindly to storm forts and castles. He personally did not take part in any siege as a military leader but set up his headquarters about two miles south of the Maros, systematically reorganized his army, and launched a series of coordinated troop movements. Different bodies of troops occupied all the important fortifications northwestward along the Maros; he himself prepared to march against Temesvár (Timișoara, Romania), giving orders for some of the forces from Bács and Bodrog counties to join him. At the same time, during the

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\(^{45}\) An anonymous Czech report came to Buda on May 31: “Krále sobě zvolili, biskupy sobě zvolili, probošty a jiža jměna uhersckých pánuv, patsyšdbana...” (They elected their king, they elected their bishops, they elected their provosts and other Hungarian lords), Schwartztenberg-Archive, Třeboň 3608b; see Fekete Nagy, Kenéz, Solymosi, and Érszegi, eds., *Monumenta rusticorum*, 90.

first few days of June he sent four other troop formations off to proceed in the four directions of the compass. One of these pushed eastward into Transylvania; a second troop with Father Lőrinc at its head set off northeasterward into Bihar County; the third and fourth troops retraced northward and northwestward, respectively—following the same path Dózsa himself had taken southward during the previous weeks—in order to push partly for Buda and partly into Heves and Abaúj counties, after crossing the River Tisza.47

It is these latter two troop movements which are of more interest for present purposes, because—contrary to all assumptions to date—it is behind these troop movements that the “Cegléd manifesto” has its role. For this reason, it is necessary to stay, however fleetingly, with this phase. One needs to be aware that, as opposed to the construction of humanist narrators (and this also applies to most modern-day writers of history) who merged different narrative elements into one another and also distorted the chronology, in the early days of June, János Bornemisza, the constable of Buda Castle, in part routed and in part pacified the remnant force of some 3,000–5,000 men from the original crusader army that had been left by Pest. So, the traitorous act committed by Ambrus “Száleresi” (Schaller? Seiler?), held by tradition, occurred not three weeks or more later at the Battle of Gubacs, but at the beginning of June. At the same time, a united army of nobles from Nógrád, Hont, Pest, and Heves counties, which had taken to horseback, dispersed or routed the smaller crusader detachments between the upper part of the Danube-Tisza interfluve and the Heves area. In that way in the first week of June the curious situation arose that while, starting from the more southerly part of Transdanubia, across the southern part of the Danube-Tisza interfluve to Transylvania, in much of Hungary east of the Tisza and the area around the River Maros (reaching up to the northeastern regions of the country), a large chunk of the kingdom’s castles and manor houses were going up in flames, in the more northerly parts of the area from Pest to the Tisza everything was, for the time being, peaceful. During the days around June 10, Dózsa’s strategy punctured the almost self-satisfied mood of the nobility of the abovementioned four counties.

On June 16, records of the news (novum) show that “in this week” (i.e., June 10–16), two large forces of crusader troops had crossed the Tisza, with one pitching camp by Tiszavárkony and the other near the market town of Heves. Further movements of both formations can also be traced through extant

47 On the details see Barta and Fekete Nagy, Parasztháború, 96–114.
sources. The one that had camped by Várkony on the night of June 21 appeared just two miles from Buda (at Gubacs), with its advance guards already engaging in skirmishes with mounted troops foraying out of Buda Castle. The strength of the formation was estimated by various sources at 5,000–7,000 men, with Dózsa’s younger brother, Gergely, as their captain, and the path of this part of the army will have naturally taken them from Tiszavárkony through Cegléd. The second formation split in two, with one branch laying siege to Debrő Castle in Heves County on June 21, and the second marching towards Szikszó, the main center of Abaúj County. The strength of the besieging force at Debrő was likewise estimated around 7,000 strong. György Dózsa’s strategy, that is to say, was entirely clear and resolute: having broken with the feudal “kingdom” (one of the senses of regnum in this period being “the nobility”), he now, for one thing, launched an attack, under his younger brother’s leadership, on the country’s capital city and “head” (caput regni), and secondly he sent new forces to unite the crusader units that had been scattered in Heves and Abaúj counties, but were still holding out here and there, so as to reattach that part of the country to the territory stretching from the River Tisza to Transylvania, which practically lay under his control. Detailed pieces of information confirm in every respect a report by Antonio Surriano, Venice’s envoy to Buda, who always kept himself well-informed: the counterpart to Dózsa’s attack on Temesvár was to send his brother against Buda.

Meanwhile forces of the nobility from the northerly parts of Abaúj County had already captured Szikszó; indeed, the small town had become their gathering place, but they were almost eyeball to eyeball with a larger crusader force in the same area. Then, at ten o’clock in the morning on June 21, Johann Sayczlich, one of the leaders of a team of reinforcements for the nobles from the city of Kassa, quickly adds the following postscript to a letter he has been writing: “Der Zekel Jorg hat den tagn wnnnt die stund bryff her ken Zyxo geschickt, das man sy zue czyhen sollen, wnnnt hym beystatt thun.” That is, this day a document in the name of György Székely has appeared in Szikszó, the content of which—a call to arms—is none other than the “Cegléd manifesto.”

The sole known example (a copy) of that call to arms addresses in general terms all towns, market towns, and villages throughout Hungary, but “most es-

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48 The only copy of this most important document of the Peasant War, titled “Ex Cegled,” without precise dating (Archivum civitatis Barphae, No. 4444, in Fekete Nagy, Kenéz, Solymosi, and Érszegi, eds., Monumenta rusticorum, 121–22) has been (erroneously) dated since Márki, Dósa György, 156, 158, 174–84, to the time when György Dózsa pulled out of Pest towards the Great Hungarian Plain in the first half of May.
especially those in Pest and Outer Szolnok counties." The four counties mentioned sent notifications on June 16, that after the conflagration which had earlier reduced the fate of counties from Bihar to Temes to ashes, "this week Heves, Outer Szolnok, and Pest counties likewise started to go up in flames, and there is no doubt that this will also spread to Abaúj . . ." (Medieval Outer Szolnok was the county in which Tiszavárkony lay; the western borderline started near Cegléd and ran eastward until the area around Mezőtúr and nearby Túrkeve.) The nobility’s prognosis was not far off the mark, because, as has been seen, the same call to arms used after June 10 to mobilize the country as the peasant army headed from Várkony to Buda, was used again to mobilize the inhabitants of Abaúj County in conjunction with another army operation on June 21. The latter is, in fact, the copy that was passed by those Kassa dwellers who were encamped at Szikszó back to Kassa, where it was copied and sent for information to Bártfa (Bardejov, Slovakia), where this copy sent from Kassa has been preserved. If any doubt still remains that this important document relates to Gergely Dózsa’s advance on Buda, it should be dispelled by the fact that the more or less distorted German and Italian translations of the intitulation (Dózsa’s heading) which gained currency in the West all, without exception and to some degree independently of one another, broadcast reports from Buda of a situation after mid-June (June 17 or later); there was no trace of such motifs in news sent before mid-June.

One of the faults made in the chronological placement of this decisive document until now, was that no one could imagine its inception in any way but with the personal presence of György Székely (Dózsa), who must indeed have himself passed through Cegléd around mid-May. Quite apart from the major difficulties sticking with this personal link to Dózsa would cause both in terms of the document’s contents and its chronology, if it is to be called (not entirely unjustifiably) a “manifesto,” multiple copies of which reached various points in the country, that personal presence is not in fact a necessary condition. In fact, the call to arms most likely originated in the early days of June, in the area between Nagylak and Lippa, with Gergely Dózsa sending multiple copies out, on behalf of his captain general, from Cegléd, a station of his march on Buda after Tiszavárkony, in mid-June (June 10–21), and as such does indeed represent the most important document of the already-declared peasant war. This also eliminates another contradiction that caused no end of difficulties for the notion that has been upheld hitherto; in this regard, György Szerémi—whose reliability on these matters has increasingly been vindicated in the light of the recently un-
The General Notion of a Popular Crusade

The “Cegléd manifesto” (there need be no qualms about sticking to the traditional name) is nothing other than a synopsis of what had become established as the ideology of the peasant war: a change of step in ideas which supersedes the “apostasy” manifested in Kecskés and Mészáros’s *summarium*, thereby radically unpacking the justification preeminently for the war against the nobility from the realm of crusader thinking. Two tiny, but all the more telling philological parallels allow one to gain an insight into the ideological mechanism.

The text announces the war by means of a quite singular, far from everyday formula: everyone is obliged to enlist in the army in order that this “sacred” and “blessed” enterprise be able to “restrain and curb” the might of the infidel (traitorous) noblemen (*vires et manus . . . infidelium . . . nobilium cohercere et refrenare . . . valeat*). Archbishop Bakócz’s instruction of April 25,49 which authorized the bishop of Transylvania and the Franciscan vicar to proclaim the “holy military expedition,” includes the formula . . . *ut hostium* (viz. the onslaught of the infidel enemy, the Turks, *perfidissimorum Turcarum* *impetus refrenari aut coerceri possint*). The textual connection is obvious, and all the more so, in that the bull of 1513 included a still more remote formula (*ad cohercendos eorum hostium impetus*). In other words, the essence of the matter is, as it were, captured here philologically: an inversion of the crusader domain of thinking under the badge of crusader ideals, with “infidel Turks” being replaced by “infidel (traitorous) noblemen” (as *infidelis* can intimate both simultaneously)!

But the notion of “restraining, curbing” is also supplemented by a third synonym in the Cegléd manifesto: *compescere* (“confine,” “hold in check,” “tame”). This is to be found in several instances in Archbishop Bakócz’s ordinance of

May 15, which has been mentioned several times before, and here specifically in a context (the rubric of the sanctions), which shows the closest relationship with the formula by which the sanctions are spelled out in the order composed by Dózsa in early June and promulgated at Cegléd in the middle of the month. Bakócz’s ordinance obligated all ecclesiastical authorities to “curb” the rebels, if necessary, with the assistance of the secular armed forces; Dózsa’s order obligates the populace of towns and villages to “curb” the nobility. The parallels are best demonstrated, of course, with the original Latin passage:

Bakócz, May 15

...sub pena excommunicationis precipimus et mandamus, qua-tinus habita presencium notitia eodem (i.e., the excommunicated and apostate preachers and their assemblies) coercetatis et compescatis. Qui si cessaverint et paruerint bene quidem; alio-quin... prescriptas penas in eos incurrere volumus.

György Székely ex Cegléd

sub excommunicationis... pena...
mandamus et committimus ...
quatenus mox statim visis presentibus (should hasten to Cegléd in order that the holy army should) coercere et refrenare et compescere valeat (the forces of the infidel nobility). Que si feceretis bene quidem; alias in penam prescriptam incurreris.

Here too the connections between the texts are unmistakable, which in itself conceals a further fascinating lesson. These formulas do not in fact appear in this complete form in Archbishop Bakócz’s definitive May 24 writ of inhibition. In other words, if Ambrus of Túrkeve, who was also familiar with the latter too (having joined the main body of the army at Nagylak) nevertheless reverted to the formulations of May 15, with the nobility likewise understood as being “rebellious,” he demonstrated thereby that the first suspension of the expedition had already exercised a decisive psychological impact on the main body of the army, when it was still in Békés; that was when the fermentation had begun. On this point, microphilology offers at one and the same time a psychological source. This fully bears out Chaplain Szerémi, in whose recollection it was there, in Békés, that Dózsa broke out for the first time in angry words: “I am not a child, nor an idiot that you should play with me; by God and the holy cross, I shall set upon you!”

If the Cegléd manifesto were now subjected to the same structural investigation as undertaken in the foregoing for the Kecskés-Mészáros interpretation of
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the bull, it may be concluded that the internal structure of the crusader sphere of thought had been rearranged, and in a certain sense overturned, but that the rearrangement consisted basically of nothing other than a consistent and radical implementation of the logic inherent in that sphere of thought. In an ideological sense, the peasant war was no more than an effectuation of Element 3, the sanctions of the crusader realm of thought, since the nobility had violently (*violenta manu*; in the bull, *violare*) attacked the holy enterprise, and “risen up” against it (*insurrexunt*). The nobles were therefore “unfaithful” and at the same time “traitorous” (*infideles*) since they had attacked a sacred matter and were consequently fitted for damnation, foul beings (*maledicti*; in the bull, *maledictio*), in essence similar to the Turks; the war against them (“the attempt to curb them”) follows logically from Element 1 of the realm of thinking, and now emerges as the goal of the crusade. As a result, the inner structure of this way of thinking is largely remodeled:

(i) With regard to the nature of the undertaking, it continues to be “holy” (*expeditio sancte congregationis, sancta turma*). The goal, as we have seen, is the restraint and curbing of the “infidel” (traitorous) nobility. It gains authority, on the one hand, from God Himself, as mediated by the blessings or benedictions of his priesthood, and in this way the army are “blessed people” (*benedicta gens, benedictum conventiculum*); and on the other, from the king of Hungary (more on this is to follow below). Dózsa himself adopts his titles in accordance with this dual authority: on the one hand, as leader of the elect, *princeps cruciferorum*; and on the other (in his secular capacity, one might say), as captain general, *supremus capitaneus*.

(ii) The reward for participation? As it happens the manifesto has nothing to say on this, which is understandable if it be considered that it was not, in fact, a “manifesto” but a military order. More will be said later about the fact that by early June, in the area along the river Maros, there had emerged some concepts in this regard as well, and not in the form of spiritual rewards either.

(iii) The sanction no longer addresses those who grumble about and obstruct the crusade, as this element of crusader thinking ipso facto was taken over into the war that had been declared against the nobility, but is addressed to those who were reluctant to join the army of the chosen. This is a new element in terms of its purport, an analysis of which in the following, will offer a key to a further important source of ideas.

Of course, there is no suggestion here that the ideology which was emerging in the Maros area was constructed purely from the crusader domain of thought;
indeed, some decidedly “secular” elements can be disentangled, but its substratum was a radically and chilastically interpreted crusader ideal. Space does not permit this to be fully unwound in all dimensions, but let it suffice to indicate that the cross remained the main symbol. It was not only the troop units from Abaúj and Zemplén counties who called themselves “faithful servants of the holy cross” (fideles servi sancti crucis), and specified their transcendental assistants as “the Most High God” and “the holy cross, whose victorious symbol we bear on our chest and which we shall under no account back out on,” as can be read in the already-cited letter from a crusader warrior from Sárospatak.50

The main body of Dózsa’s army itself advanced under this banner. It is precisely its hostile prejudice that authenticates in this connection a memoir by Matthias Künisch, the chaplain to George, margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach (Georg der Fromme), which recorded that Dózsa’s envoy on June 10 called on the defenders of Solymos Castle (Iňačovce, Slovakia) to surrender with the final argument: “Do not act against the cross” (Nicht wider das kreuz tetten).51 Contemporaneous sources also attest52 that later (e.g., on June 18) the priests of the peasant war continued to invoke the common people to rise up “on behalf of the cross,” and the memoirs of György Szerémi are reliable on this point too: up until the end, on July 15, the shibboleths were the sancta crux and a shout of Jesus’s name repeated three times over, and the outlook which Szerémi professes to be his own as well, was that anyone who attacked the peasants “attacks the holy cross”; anyone who was on their side was “for the holy cross.” It would be worthy of special analysis, for which there is no opportunity here, to look into the polysemantic role of fides as a central concept in the crusader ideology (with simultaneous connotations of “faith,” “faithfulness,” and “oath”), and of the antithetical pair of fidelis—infidelis, which in this conceptual system was the primary borderline between “us” and “them” (the enemy).53

This way of thinking had an underlying chiliastic load, because there is no doubt that divine “election” was an essential component. This was not, however, submerged in an eschatological gloom; its undeniably “lay” assemblers who are to be mentioned below refrained from doing so. Judgment Day, Anti-
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christ, “thousand-year kingdom”—formulations of that kind may have come up and played a role, but there is no trace of them in the sources. From where, then, did the ideological substratum come? This latent debate, in my view, can now be decided fairly categorically in the light of new data and links. The composite as a whole indubitably moves a long way from the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church, but it is still not explicitly heretic, not being compatible with, for instance, the Hussite articles of faith. It need only be compared with the precepts of the radical Hussites (Taborites) of Southern Hungary in the 1420s and 1430s, as recorded by James of the Marches.\(^{54}\) With them it was a matter of complete denial of the Roman Catholic Church and papal power, which is not the case here; with them there was a rejection of excommunication in general, while here it was an important tool in the hands of the “elect”; with them there was a repudiation of all representations, including that of the cross, whereas here even the crucifix plays a role, the cross is actually the supreme symbol; with them a renunciation of the taking of oaths, whereas here mutual avowed pledges and swearing on the cross are common motifs; with them the sale of indulgences was rejected, while here it is a weapon in the hands of the revolutionary priesthood; with them, lay priesthood and a disavowal of monasticism were principles, whereas here parsons and monks took a prominent role, and so on. With an awareness of these contrasts in mind, it is scarcely possible to speak of direct or dominant Hussite influences. The investigations of the author bear out a conjecture advanced by Tibor Kardos who, in starting to look for the main source of the currents acting within Franciscan Observance in the heresy of the Spirituals (followers of Joachim of Fiore), draws attention to a commentary by Petrus Johannis Olivi on the Book of Revelation.\(^{55}\) The analogies were close, and indeed quite direct, for Olivi specified those who were marked with the cross as a “sign of God” (signo et charactere Dei), as a form of the army of “new soldiers of Christ,” the “chosen people” (electi), who after much suffering, tolerance, and tribulation were destined for victory and annihilation of the “sect of the Antichrist.” Since there can be little doubt that the “scandal-sewing” and “sin-infected” members of the Observant Order of Franciscans in Hungary in 1512–13 were in good part the same as the “false and hostile” preachers of the crusade and “apostates” of

\(^{54}\) See also the similar statements of the Hussites who fled to Moldova (1461), cited in footnote 39 above: Coli. E. Fermandzin, Acta Bosnae potissimum ecleistica (Zagreb, 1892) (Monumenta Spectantia Historiam Slavorum Meridionalium 23), 145–48.

\(^{55}\) Kardos, A magyarországi humanizmus kora, 375–76, 184–87.
1514, this intellectual stratum of the leadership had to be aware of this realm of thought, transmitting it and harmonizing it with the then prevailing, more or less ready-made crusader ideology.

None of this excludes the possibility that certain Hussite traditions or dormant fragments might have had a hand in the emergence of this ideology. As György Székely has already pointed out, the emphatic element of the justifiability of vengeance, benediction offered independently of the official Church, the notion of a membrum dyaboli, and also, as will be shown further on, expropriation of the Church’s worldly goods, perhaps even the principle of “one bishop,” are in all likelihood motifs of Hussite origin.

In the end, as already emphasized, in many borderline cases it is in fact impossible to separate clearly and distinctly “heretic” doctrines from elements deriving from monastic “apostasy,” because the views themselves coincide; indeed, most likely the individuals who transmitted them were for the most part identical. But the main point is not so much to ascertain the exact “proportions” (that would be impossible anyway) as the fact that in 1514, in accordance with its own inner, autogenous laws, self-standing in its final outward appearance and heretic by nature, an ideology was built up with little doubt through several stages (but at least two stages as evidenced by sources) that can now justifiably be called the broad concept of a popular crusade. This outgrowth is peculiar to Hungary (its elements have antecedents stretching back to 1456), having no near equivalent among any of the European peasant uprisings, just as there is no sign anywhere else of the notion of a “crusader army” being so tightly identified with the notion of a “peasant uprising” as occurred in Hungary during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Those who were living in these centuries and feared a peasant movement would, following Calvinist theologian and writer Péter Méliusz Juhász (1536–72), refer in dialect to a “crusader host”; and then there was Péter Császár (1600–32), the serf leader of a peasant uprising in the Upper Tisza area in 1631–32, who in seeking a symbol for his uprising, had a crusader standard attributed to Dózsa brought from Ráckeve, the Danubian town twenty-five miles south of Pest...

Another matter of note on this subject is that although there is always some sort of link to be found between revolutionary movements in this part of the world, it is not absolutely necessary to think of the revolution as being imported. There are certainly some sources which hint obscurely at Bohemians coming to

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Hungary in 1514; yet these are to be kept separate from surmises and concerns that were manifested in the papal court, because the basis of these was that if any sort of “disturbance of the peace” were to be manifested anywhere in Central and Eastern Europe the Church in Rome would immediately search hystERICALLY to find the handiwork of the “Bohemians.” Quite another criterion needs to be applied, however, to a specific message sent from Buda by an Italian priest, an auditor of Archbishop Bakócz, regarding an agitation by certain Bohemians on June 15, 1514. It is possible, as it happens, to trace its nucleus in the source literature with Bartholomew, Duke of Münsterberg, the Bohemian supporter of Władysław II Jagiello, the Hungarian king, who came with a military escort from Poland via Bohemia, and arrived in Buda in the middle of June 1514. On the other hand, a messenger named Lénárd Bor arrived at Szikszó from Buda a week later, on June 21, with news that the king had engaged 400 mercenaries and wished to dispatch them down the Danube against Dózsa; when, on boarding the ships, they learned what the objective of their expedition was, they slew their captain and went over to György Székely/Dózsa’s side. It is certain that these two pieces of information are linked, particularly in view of the coincidence of their points in time (and also, not least, the consideration that in Hungary at this time the term mercenary was in practice synonymous with Bohemian soldier). It was not “10,000 warriors” from Bohemia who fought in Dózsa’s army (as a Czech chronicle rather naïvely put it), but 400. Not that this has much to offer from a viewpoint of the history of ideas because, as it has been observed, the ideology of the peasant war had already attained maturity.

The relationship in 1514 was, if anything, the reverse from what it had been in the 1420s and 1430s: the “brothers in Bohemia,” having been pushed into the background, began to take heart from the lead shown by the Hungarian peasant uprising, as can be learned from a July 18 letter by Leo, Lord of Rosental (Lev Zdeněk z Rožmitálu), High Burgrave of Prague (and at the same time also a chief spokesman for Czech feudal anarchy): “these ‘people,’ on the pretext of

58 The report of the Venetian envoy in Rome of July 7 sums up well the general mood in the Curia; Archive of Venice, Dispacci di Roma 1514, 65; cf. Fekete Nagy, Kenéz, Solymosi, and Érszegi, eds., Monumenta rusticorum, 150–51.
59 Magyar Történelmi Tár 13 (1867), 250.
60 In the report of the leader of the troops of Kassa, Johann Sayczlich of Szikszó, on June 21: Archivum Civitatis Cassoviae, Suppl. H. 302; cf. Fekete Nagy, Kenéz, Solymosi, and Érszegi, eds., Monumenta rusticorum, 125–16.
support for the king, are preparing to follow the example of the Hungarian crusaders . . . . ” The Czech peasantry and urban paupers, however, were now caught in an iron vise from both sides. The Bohemian echo of the Hungarian peasant war had just given rise to the assembly on Kutná Hora at the end of June, where in view of the danger, the rancorous feudal parties had hurriedly made up their differences and, with mutual oaths of support, set up a defensive alliance; on the other hand, the king’s supporter, the said Duke Bartholomew, having returned to Prague on July 1, on Wladislas’s authority had recruited a Czech military force several thousand strong to suppress the Hungarian peasant uprising.61 In this vise, Kolín, Poděbrad, and other Hussite strongholds, indeed the Bohemian peasantry in general, were unable to budge.

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The ideal of a popular crusade is by no means the same as the ideology of the Hungarian peasant war. The program also had a stratum explicitly secular in origin and nature; it was in the context of this stratum and together with it that the body of ideas that has been outlined above made up a unified whole. An Italian informant, Niccolò de Zuanne, on the basis of reports received from Italians living in Buda, wrote on August 11 that after Dózsa had been captured, János Szapolyai, who at the time was the voivode of Transylvania, asked him: “What were you expecting? What was your plan?” To which Dózsa is supposed to have replied: “come el volea renovar el Regno de Hongaria”—he had wanted to renew, to “renovate” the country.62

In looking for the springs of this “renovation,” let us start off once more from an interesting point in the Cegléd manifesto, the sanctions. According to these, Dózsa ordered the people to join up on pain of “excommunication and everlasting damnation,” along with a loss of their own heads and livestock, should they fail to do so—which is consistent with his “dual capacity,” because as princeps cruciferorum he places in prospect a spiritual punishment for ignoring the crusader ideal, whereas as captain general this is the customary worldly sanction for not obeying a call-up. Not content with that, though, the following punishment also awaits the insubordinate: they shall be hanged or impaled in front of their

61 On the events in Bohemia see František Palacký, Geschichte von Böhmen (Prague, 1816–67) V/2, 306.
house, their belongings will be destroyed and plundered, their house demolished, and even their family will not be spared. Lest there be any misunderstanding, this threat applies not just to nobles, but to those of his own class,burghers, the inhabitants of market towns, and rural serfs. 63 Researchers have always skated over this detail, perceiving it to be simply a terrifying threat of deterrence showing haphazard severity.

Years after the peasant war was suppressed, the stewards of the castle of Hunyad (Hunedoara, Romania) report in 1520 that preparations were underway in the market town of Monostor (Mănăstur, Romania) in Temes County for fresh turmoil, sewn by the same individuals who had in the first round been crusaders, and were again “holding assemblies (congregationes) outside the usual places and proclaiming in the manner of the Szekler people (more Siculorum) that anyone reluctant to come to the assemblies would have their house demolished and leveled to the ground . . .” 64 Monostor was a long way away from the land that had been apportioned to the Szekler people in Transylvania, so the mos Siculorum can only relate to the crusader period.

Two accurate and vivid accounts—descriptions sprung from the quills of Miklós Oláh (Nicolaus Olahus, 1493–1568) and the previously mentioned Antal Verancsics—are extant from the mid-sixteenth century about the conduct of constituent assemblies of the Szeklers. These accord in stating that if, at such a gathering, anyone came forward with proposals which would have limited Szekler liberties (“Willkür”), or anyone did not comply with a call-up order from the army, the entire community would fall “bodily” (agminatim) upon that person’s house and raze it to the ground, and if they manage to lay hands on the offender, they killed him. 65

By going through the whole series of documents, it can be settled to full satisfaction that this was not a matter of an act of tyranny, but of ancient legal custom: in these cases, the ritual house demolition was a verdict of the assembly at the seat, tota communitas, which incidentally was complemented by the custom that if a condemned person were subsequently pardoned, the community would rebuild the dwelling. The frequency of uprisings by the Szekler in this era (1466, 1492, 1498, 1511, 1519) was in all instances presaged by a rash of house demoli-

63 See footnote 48.
64 July 1, 1520, Hunyad. Staatsarchiv München, Brandenburgica 1056/17.
65 Nicolaus Olahus, Hungariae liber II. Atila (Vindobonae, 1763), 197; Antonius Veranchich, De sit Transylvaniae, Moldaviae et Transalpinae, Monumenta Hungariae Historica, Scriptores II., ed. László Szalay (Pest, 1857), 146.
tions, and in point of fact the call-up into the army in such cases (e.g., in 1492) contains the same wording of the clause regarding sanctions as the Cegléd manifesto.66 Even in instances where the king or the voivode of Transylvania strove to mitigate the custom (1499, 1519), the essence of the regulation was that henceforth the community should not “on its own authority” utilize house demolition and the traditional manner of death sentence against those who were judged to have infringed the liberties, and could only do so with the knowledge of the Szekler county head (the “székelyispán”).67

On this point, then, the Cegléd manifesto adopts an element of Szekler customary law, and when this lead is followed up, one comes across a number of other specific elements of similar origin. Also, elements of this kind are the ancient character of communal coercion of call-ups for army service and attendance of the assembly, or the carrying around of a bloody sword as a form of call-up to the army, which which in those days was indeed an exclusively Szekler custom (see e.g., the military regulations from 1463).68 And perhaps one of Dózsa’s titles (the secular one) also comes from here, as all signs indicate that the *supremus capitaneus* was not an original title dating from April 24, 1514, because in contrast to the forms *rector* and *dux*, with which most of the authentic contemporaneous sources (the previously mentioned letter mandating the camp priesthood itself) are acquainted, this was the Latin title of the military leader of the Szekler seat.69

In other words, the Szekler model of the situation is repeatedly evident in the concept that arose in the Maros area. Is it not possible, therefore, that this also lurks behind several of the broader plans for political and social reform? The tenets substantiating the basic formula of “renovating the country” are fairly well-known: the king remained, the nobility were to be eliminated, and just one bishop would be retained in the Church organization. These motifs have survived in multiple contemporaneous items of intelligence quite independently of each other, so there can be no doubt as to their authenticity. Their tim-

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66 Károly Szabó, ed., *Szekely oklevéltár* [Szekler documents] (henceforth quoted as SZO), I. (Kolozsvár, 1872), 314–15, III. (Kolozsvár, 1890), 86, 122; 134, 177, 207.
67 SZO. I. 338–39; III. 143.
68 SzO I. 196ff. For the custom of the carrying around of a bloody sword, see the anonymous report in *Történelmi Tár*, N. S. 6 (1905), 274, and Antonio Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum Decas I.* ed. József Főgél, Béla Iványi, and Ladislaus Juhász (Lipsiae, 1936), 56 (lib. 2, 199).
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ing is also not accidental, because as the news spread in Buda around the middle of June, the reform program had to belong to the same early-June transformation as the three-branched military maneuver and the Cegléd army call-up order itself, which as it happens captures the basic principle in the most authentic manner: Dózsa himself is "a subject solely of the king of Hungary, not of the lords" (regis Hungarie tantummodo subditus et non dominorum). What role did Dózsa envisage for himself, though? According to one communication from Buda on June 17, Dózsa also sent a letter to the king: the country should be left with the king alone, a single bishop, and two lords (zwem herrn, die dem künig dienen); the rest, if they remained “intractable” for any length of time, would have to be eliminated.71 There are several credible reports to the effect that indeed only one or two “lords” would remain—first and foremost, Dózsa himself. According to Chaplain Künisch’s memoir, Dózsa called for the surrender of Solymos Castle on the grounds that unlike he himself, George of Brandenburg was no longer a lord (nicht mehr eyn herr). According to Antal Verancsics, a Hungarian diarist, one of the captains of Southern Hungary, Antal Nagy had it proclaimed in his camp that apart from the king and his son, “no one is a lord in Hungary, only ... György Székely and then he himself, Antal Nagy.”72 Presumably, there were of course diverse notions on the matter, but given what has been outlined so far, the “two lords” motif (a solitary mention, unfortunately, but it is not inconceivable that it likewise stems from Dózsa himself) does justifiably raise the question of whether this was another notion which had a Szekler model as its basis. In the circumstances under which the Szeklers of those times were living, principle and praxis were fairly widely separated; ordinary members of the community had more than a few “lords” to burden them, above all the ruling class, the estate of the “primores,” which had risen to prominence from the ranks of the Szekler society itself. The Szekler rebellions of the preceding decades were directed at “curbing” precisely these “primores,” including the voivodes of Transylvania and their familials, who were trampling on their rights. In principle, however, to the Szekler worldview only “two lords” existed between the king and the autonomous community of freemen: the székelyispán

70 These sources are cited by Székely, “A Dózsa parasztháború.”
71 An abstract from this letter (“auff datum XVI Iunii dits iars”) is a variant of the tract printed in various German presses in the summer and fall of 1514: “Ain groß wunderzaichen...” (Bayrische Staatsbibliothek, München, Rar. 351; Akadémiai Könyvtár, Budapest, RM IV, 88).
(admittedly for decades this had been one and the same person as the voivode of Transylvania) and the royal superintendent (királybíró) of the Szekler communities ("seats").

Loyalty to the king and the “one bishop” principle do not call for explanation, being widespread attributes of peasant uprisings in Europe. Nor is there much need to refute the fairytale of the election of a “peasant king,” which had already begun to spread by the end of May, partly a product of distortion by news- and horror-mongers, and partly a product of foreign interpretations of the Ceglédi manifesto; the princeps cruciferorum in Dózsa’s title (identical, incidentally, with the title borne by the crusader captains Kecskés and Mészáros) became the basis for a semantic shift to “prince, sovereign,” out of which German kunig and Italian eletto re were among the forms which emerged in translations of the title. The most decisive refutations in this respect reside in the sources, which sprang up on the spot, in Maros district. On June 10, Dózsa was rendered homage “by the will of the king,” and in his recollections none other than Georg Prantner, the man who led the defense of Solymos, gives Dózsa the title that was actually used there at the time: der kreutzer hawpman.73 Finally, no lengthy proof is required to show that by elimination of the nobility (the phrase ingrained in chancery jargon was delere nobilitatem) it is not their physical elimination which is implied, but their abolition. Dózsa did wish to eradicate all those who in the light of his own principles proved “traitorous and infidels” (infideles). His own most credible statement on the subject is again what is to be read in the Ceglédi manifesto, where, as has been seen, three synonyms are employed: “curbing,” “restraining,” and “holding in check” the nobility.

What could he have had in mind with regard to the arrangements of society? In regard to this there are, first and foremost, two most authentic pieces of information, but unfortunately these are potentially misleading because both are couched in such mediocre Latin that one has a hard time understanding them. One of them comes from the interrogation of a witness in 1515, the relevant line of which, in the view of the author, was correctly interpreted by György Székely: a nobleman was granted clemency by the crusaders for promising that “he would be stirring people up as much as any serf.”74 The second is a report from Chap-

73 Prantner recalls this at the end of August: “Jaenisch diack wer geschickt von der kreutzer hawpman, der wegern were inn daß schlöf gultich einzugeben, von wegen kunigklicher mayester...” Archivum Publicum Norenbergense, Archivum familiae Brandenburgensis, 1052/1. Cf. Fekete Nagy, Kenéz, Solymosi, and Érszegi, eds., Monumenta rusticorum, 217.
74 According to a testimony in Sasvár in Ugocsá County, on May 15, 1515: a witness “audivit a ceteris rusticis"
lain Szerémi, which can be considered as good as a “crusader source,” not merely on account of being well-informed, but also on the basis of its conceptualization: he guesses that Father Lőrinc’s principle was “si . . . victoriam optimemus, quilibet nobilium habebit.” As it stands, it makes no sense, being badly formulated, but as his Latin is full of passages which are obscured by similar ellipses, often precisely parts related to a genitive plural, the sense can be retrieved as being: “. . . quilibet [rusticorum status or bona] nobilium habebit,” that is, every peasant shall gain noble status or the goods of the nobility. The two pieces of information are seemingly at odds with each other. The first reduces a noble to the level of a peasant, whereas in the second, a peasant is seeking to raise himself to the level of a nobleman. Yet taken together, for that very reason, it probably illustrates fairly unambiguously the likely reality at the time, the Szekler people’s typically intermediate position between the “true” nobility and the peasantry; that is, the Szekler conditions were most likely at the forefront of Dózsa’s views for his idea of renovation: the extension of Szekler libertas and property rights to Hungary’s peasantry.

With knowledge of the foregoing data and connections we are, after all, to some extent in a position to weigh up a later report by Gianmichele Bruto, who, with reference to Cuspinianus (Spiessheimer), states in two places that the goal was supposed to have been the effacement of the nobility, “the creation of a single, equal estate,” the retention of a single bishop, along with a redistribution of the properties of the nobility and Church to those who had distinguished themselves in the campaign.75 None of that would have aroused any suspicion if it had in fact been what Cuspinianus had said, because the Viennese humanist did actually spend three weeks in Buda in September 1514, and again a longer period in October and November of that year; for all his prejudice and confusions over times, he is relatively well-informed. However, in his Diarium (1515) there happens to be not a single word on the last and most critical of the factors. As a result, the information about the redistribution of land is Bruto’s alone, from the 1580s. All the same, the Venetian humanist, during his relatively short stay of altogether three years in Transylvania, did manage to acquire a few (rather meager) elements of the tradition, and inasmuch as Dózsa did indeed have in mind a settlement of the position of the Hungarian serfs on the model of Sze-

75 Sirmiensis, Epistola de perdicione regni Hungarorum, 69.

that a certain nobleman, captive among the rebels has promised that if they spared his life, “adaucter (?) tantum gubernat, quantum unus colonus.” Andor Komáromy, ed., Történelmi Tár (1897), 492; Székely, “A Dózsa-parasztáhború ideológiájához,” 493, Georgii Sirmiensis, Epistola de perdicione regni Hungarorum, 69.
kler rights of freedom, as a matter of fact there would have been nothing extraordinary in the manner of a redistribution of land; more than that, it was the only conceivable solution that was ready to hand.

At this point, it is no longer possible to avoid addressing the matter of the so-called “Dózsa speeches.” It may have been noted that not a word of these popular texts has been drawn upon in the present attempt to reconstruct the ideology of the peasant war—and with good reason. Only one of the troubling factors in regard to these texts, widely known in three sets of editorial hands, is that none of the three descriptions included give even the faintest shred of evidence that these were delivered in Cegléd (nevertheless, it would appear that the power of the historiographer should not be despised, because ever since Márki’s day, popular and unpopular editions have handled them as the most self-evident of facts; indeed, the fiction of a “Cegléd speech” may even be slipped in by way of a subtitle), but that in fact they most certainly were never delivered. Not that Dózsa’s vocabulary ran to little more than the sort of clipped commands that have been preserved by authentic sources (“flee the beast” and the like). Nor would there be anything surprising in that; it is only natural that Dózsa spoke in a befitting manner to his army, and just as natural that in point of fact, he left the delivery of speeches to those whose vocation it was: the revolutionary priests. However, the oratorical performances we are aware of present fundamental difficulties when subjected to critical scrutiny of their sources and content. The role of the oratio emulating models of antiquity in humanist historiography is well known: the writers use a classicizing toga in part to clothe the explanation for events, in part to mask the tricky brunt of what had to be said (in this instance the opinion about the nobility). That in itself would not rule out the possibility of a writer occasionally weaving in a traditional element into the rhetoric: this is an area in which the late Bruto, for instance, comes unstuck because the grittier kernel of his mannered and grandiloquent torrent of words is either present in his sources (Cuspinianus, Tubero, Iovius) or is augmented with erudite elements (e.g., the crumbs of an “organic constitutionalism”) that are not only bound to be alien to peasant mentality, but are also jarring in the context of the other constituents of the speech. As has already been indicated, Stieröchsel-Tauroinus could have been the greatest user of traditional elements, but the views of the general public interested in history has barely been grazed by the thorough philological study of Zoltán Császárr in which, from passage to passage, he showed the literal quotes on the one hand, and, on the other, the narrative borrowings from the authors of antiquity in relation to these “speeches.” Discounting these,
along with the commonplace contemporaneous humanist topoi lashing the lifestyle of the nobility and describing the nature of virtus, one is left with altogether two “nubs” where a direct literary source is not demonstrable: the equality of human beings in the age of Adam and Eve (although that was an element familiar to all from the near-contemporaneous German peasant movements) and the contrasting of “servility” with “liberty” (a widespread antique motif regardless of any concordances of texts).

In the case of the Ragusan Tubero, it is a matter of a more sober, rational text with fewer slavish borrowings from literary works, but one can no doubt separate out in a similar manner an agglomeration of literary inspiration, moralizing, and a body of knowledge of general social critique from elements which possibly derive from oral tradition; if the latter are inspected more closely, however, they are nothing but generalities. At this point the chief underminer of the credibility of the “speeches” kicks in: the “speeches” are lengthy and well-formed, but they contain nothing at all of the most characteristic and specific structural elements of the genuine and authentic ideology which can be extricated from primary sources! Not that this should be any surprise: the writers may have been informed—at the cost of greater or lesser distortion—of the events which occurred, but it was not part of the humanist approach to cross-examine the peasants who had heard firsthand the utterances of Dózsa or his preachers at Temesvár or by the Maros. Roughly, all they knew at most (what had been “said” here and there) was that certain speeches had been delivered. The curious thing is that these same humanists preserved more fragments of the authentic tradition about the peasant mentality in the narrative texts than in the “speeches”; for them an oration was something different—a specimen of rhetorical composition intended as a masterpiece. . . . When Taurinus presents in Dózsa’s voice that as a boy he had heard sermons of this kind from friars in cowls (i.e., from Franciscans), and goes on to imitate them, this does not mean that Taurinus had any specific information about Dózsa having been heard to make such a declaration, but something quite different: it is an organic element of the propagandist thread running through the entire “epic,” according to which the man responsible for what happened was not Archbishop Bakócz, it was far more the Observant Franciscans who were left carrying the can, because the demagogue in question may well have learned his style from them. In this sense, of course, this is also a source, but on the whole these “speeches” are sources for the social critique and body of knowledge of the writers themselves; any credibility of the possibly genuine elements is vitiated, if that is possible, by the approach.
adopted in humanist historiography, because these vapid generalizations, “left-.
over” elements which lack the least individual characterization, are extremely
suspect even in themselves.

Having, with good reason, eliminated the fictional “Dózsa speeches” from
the sources, to sum up briefly, it can be ascertained that the ideology of the
Hungarian peasant war of 1514 had two substrata. The first of these was the
general notion of a popular crusade, already analyzed at length, which in turn
sprang from several sources, and is an independent creation of mainly ecclesias-
tical participants in the uprising (all the signs point to them being primarily
the representatives of an “apostate” mysticism of a heretical nature). Most
clearly identifiable among those whose features come to prominence are four
such individuals: the two provincial crusader preachers from Szikszo, Tamás
Kecskés and Lőrinc Mészáros, along with Father Lőrinc and Ambrus of
Türkeve from Dózsa’s own milieu. The “secular” substratum is no less than the
model of Transylvanian Szekler relations, which was increasingly effective the
more it found a receptive audience among the representatives of market town
freedoms (it is deemed unnecessary to expand upon the nature and significance
of these freedoms, given that modern research happens to have dealt most in-
tensely with precisely this aspect of the question). In all likelihood, this is a
matter of György (Székely) Dózsa’s personal role. After all, the Szeklers them-
selves had nothing to do with the peasant war, and even in principle, it is
scarcely conceivable, given that their liberties in themselves were, to some ex-
tent, more “feudal” in nature than to allow the Szekler to have felt any sense of
community with the serfs. The accidental circumstance that a former Szekler
became the leader of the peasant war (because he was a former Szekler, who was
to became a leader only in the course of events) made it easier for a fairly defi-
nite program to be evolved within what was relatively a very short space of
time, and moreover a program that one has difficulty imagining would arise, in
view of their situation, among the ranks of Hungary’s serfs, and also of such a
nature that it had, to some extent, a sobering influence in clamping down on
extremism rooted in chiliastic mysticism. It is in this way, and for this reason,
that the program could be at once very radical and, at the same time, “realistic”—
a fairly unique variant in the history of peasant uprisings in Europe.

 Skipping many of the details, let three further ideological features, which
show that these two substrata merge into a highly organic unity, be highlighted
purely as markers. There are several signs indicating that some form of a vigorous
notion of “freedom” must have played a role in the way that the Hungarian peas-
The ideological structure of the peasant war was also precisely expressed by
its symbols. The symbolism of visible and palpable things is of extraordinary sig-
nificance in every social movement, especially the older popular movements. Dózsa’s people had two symbols or even badges, one might say: the red cross and the bloody stake. The movement was accompanied, from the end of April until its final downfall in early August, by a white flag upon which there was a crim-
son cross, as well as the cross sewn to the chests of the peasants. But the stake
was not merely a practical device for executions. A document of August 25 says
of the burghers of Zagreb, who were following the example of the Hungarian crusaders: “in their comings and goings they carried a pointed stake before them
on the example and manner of the false and rebellious crusaders.” In Solymos
Castle, Georg Prantner and Chaplain Matthias Künsch awaited in anguish and tears the moment when the long procession of the enemy would march in clutching stakes. Contemporary letters report that György Dózsa sent out bloodied stakes alongside a bloody sword to the villages. The stake had a dual
symbolism: it was a symbol of vengeance against the nobility and also a threaten-
ing emblem of communal coercion for the peasants. Divine “election” and vo-
cation of the “blessed people” on the one hand, and social vengeance and the stern dictate of the community on the other: they were just as organic and in-
separable elements of a unitary ideological structure, in just the same way as those two—for us hardly reconcilable—instruments, the cross and the stake,
necessarily complemented each other in the summer of 1514.

This analysis modifies, alters, and rearranges many of the matters in the
widely held historical picture that are current in the general consciousness. This
follows from the internal ferment of this research; further investigation, in the
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possession of newer data and perceptions, will no doubt modify the picture still further. The deductions reached here will shatter certain customary notions and visions. An attempt has been made to offer something else in exchange: something to hang on to in the dynamic of historical ferment, and above all ideological ferment, with an attempt being made on certain points to outline with more pronounced features the world of ideas—the tragically failed goals and desires—of people who were living at the time, those ideas, goals, and desires which may, perhaps, bring the physiognomies of their formulators, faded through the remoteness of centuries, a step closer. The intelligentsia of the peasant war (the first group of revolutionary intellectuals in Hungarian history), including its leader in person, may thereby also come a step nearer, somewhat nearer as individuals, than was the case hitherto; while the uprising itself may find some stronger threads than heretofore, linking it into a general European phenomenon and current, that of a popular-radical pre-Reformation. These findings may perhaps offer some compensation for the losses.

Translated by Tim Wilkinson