

INTRODUCTION



From 1526 until 1699, the Habsburg Monarchy contended with the Ottoman Empire for the Kingdom of Hungary, a territory much larger than modern Hungary. The Habsburgs eventually won out, after the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 was broken up by a crusading army led by a Polish king. But for the previous two centuries, the Ottomans had continually gained territory in Hungary. Despite European advances in gunpowder weapons, the sultan's army was superior in most respects. Europeans of the era, set off against one another in various ways, were also divided over the conflict in Hungary. The kings of France, so they said, would gladly have renewed their historic role as Christendom's leaders against the Muslim Turks, were it not for the overweening ambition of the Habsburgs, which compelled France to ally with the Ottomans. For their part, the Habsburgs foreswore any intention of dominating Europe; they merely defended lands that had accrued to their dynasty by inheritance or other lawful means. In an age of religious strife, Protestants tended to think, as the French did, that it was only provocation by the Catholic Habsburgs that caused the Ottomans to attack in Hungary. Catholics (unless they were French) looked to the Habsburgs as the *de facto* protectors of Christendom against the armies of Islam, advancing now as they had in past centuries. Still, notwithstanding sharp divisions of this kind, Europeans were eager for news of fighting in the east, and those who hoped for a Turkish victory were probably few.

Modern historians are likewise divided, often in view of interpretative strategies, as discussed below. The most striking difference reflects historical proximity. There are numerous studies in the languages of central Europe (German, Hungarian, and several Slavic languages), but relatively few in English, French, or Dutch.¹ The lack of interest in central Europe by scholars writing in these languages may in part reflect a particular outlook on early modern history. Many historians now work from the idea that Europe's economic and cultural center of gravity shifted during the sixteenth century from Italy to the Atlantic fringe.² The Atlantic nations colonized the Americas and parts of Africa, and opened direct routes to Asia, hitherto connected to Europe only through a long chain of intermediaries. Once hailed as triumphs of western civilization, the exploits of

early modern colonists and traders have lately come to be seen in a darker light. But what is seldom noted is that the nations that expanded overseas were only part of the European story. In the complex of lands scholars call the Habsburg Monarchy, and in parts of the Holy Roman Empire, the expansion that occupied peoples' minds was an expansion at their expense. Hence the title of this collection. These essays deal with a Europe that in a manner of speaking looked east, not to distant Asia, but to nearby lands recently conquered by the seemingly unstoppable armies of the sultan. Since most of the essays appeared in specialized journals, each chapter here is prefaced by a new paragraph meant to indicate a wider setting.

Ferdinand I (1503–64), the younger brother of Emperor Charles V, was archduke of Austria from 1522, king of Bohemia and Hungary from 1526, and Holy Roman Emperor from 1558. He was the single most important figure in the early history of Habsburg–Ottoman relations, but it is hard to find discussion of his reign in English. The latest biography in English has little to say about the conflict in Hungary. A new and lively history of the Habsburg dynasty gives a good account of Ferdinand's succession to the thrones of Bohemia and Hungary but passes over his struggle to hold Hungary. A valuable discussion of the Ottoman Empire in European political thought remarks in passing on events in Hungary: "As [Ferdinand] tried to impose himself on Hungary as its new king, the Hungarian nobility chose instead the Prince of Transylvania, who was forced by Ferdinand's military intervention to turn to [Sultan] Suleyman for support. Ferdinand's renewed effort to claim Hungary after the Prince's death in 1540 would lead to a full-scale Ottoman occupation of the kingdom."³ This capsule summary, like most English-language accounts, represents the dynasty as pushing into areas where it was not wanted. There is and was a different point of view. Habsburg documents, used in many of the studies here, tell of repeated defeats at the hands of an enemy looking for opportunities to advance. The following pages offer an overview of the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, an outline of conflicts in Hungary during the reigns of Ferdinand I and Maximilian II, his son and successor, and a few words about the themes of this book.

The Habsburg Monarchy

The medieval Holy Roman Empire, based in Germany, was seen by contemporaries as the historic successor of the Roman Empire. The king of the Romans, as he was called, was elected by Germany's princes.⁴ (Voting was limited to seven "electors," four secular princes and three prince-archbishops.)⁵ Various families competed for the royal title, and the electors seldom chose two members of the same family in succession. By tradition, the king of the Romans was recognized as emperor when he was crowned by the pope. King Rudolf I of Habsburg

(r. 1273–91) reclaimed for the crown imperial lands that had been bartered away, including four duchies on the empire's southeastern frontier: Austria, Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola (roughly, modern Slovenia). But most lands regained by Rudolf were bartered away again by his successors, or passed into the hands of those named as administrators; this was how the Habsburg family became hereditary rulers in Austria.⁶

A later Habsburg, Archduke Frederick III (d. 1493), was king of the Romans from 1440 and emperor from 1452. During his long reign, there was a little-remarked transition by which Germany's elective monarchy became *de facto* hereditary. His son and successor, Emperor Maximilian I (r. 1493–1519), married Mary of Burgundy, heiress of Burgundy in France,⁷ and of the Low Countries provinces (roughly, modern Belgium and the Netherlands). Their son married Joanna, a daughter of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. Their son was the future Emperor Charles V (b. 1500, r. 1519–56). By right of his father and his paternal grandfather, Charles was heir apparent to Austria and the Low Countries. Due to the unexpected deaths of his mother's older brother and sister, he was also heir to the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, and Aragon's Italian lands, the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. He was elected king of the Romans in 1519 and was crowned emperor by Pope Clement VII in 1530. Charles's complex of lands straddled the continent, surrounding France on three sides. France's Valois kings thus became inveterate foes of Habsburg hegemony in Europe and successive Habsburg–Valois wars would be the dominant motif of sixteenth-century power politics.⁸

In 1521 Charles assigned the family's Austrian lands to his younger brother. Ferdinand's inheritance lacked many of the advantages of his older brother's lands. Charles's domain revenues in Castile included a sales tax that funded long-term, low-interest loans popular with the investing public. Ferdinand's domain revenues were already over-pledged at his accession, and even more indebted at his death in 1564.⁹ Only Charles's armies had Spanish *tercios*, crack infantry skilled in the use of firearms. Different realms meant different interests, although Ferdinand habitually deferred to Charles, and the brothers made a good show of hiding their disagreements. This was also the age of Martin Luther, and the Habsburgs, firmly Catholic, stood against a rising tide. But Ferdinand gained a valuable flexibility; in the Austrian lands, unlike Spain, one had to negotiate with powerful men who were and would remain Protestant. At Diets of the Holy Roman Empire, an absent Charles often had Ferdinand serve as his deputy; yet as Archduke of Austria, nothing more, he had no respect. In 1531, Charles agreed to support his brother's election as king of the Romans.¹⁰

Ferdinand's future prospects had changed suddenly in 1526, owing to events in the Kingdom of Hungary, Austria's eastern neighbor. Buda was the capital, then as now, but medieval Hungary extended from the Adriatic Sea to the Carpathian Mountains, embracing modern Croatia, Slovakia and parts of

Rumania, Serbia, and Ukraine. In the time of Emperor Frederick III, Hungary was a formidable power; King Matthias Corvinus (r. 1458–90) occupied Styria and Lower Austria. But royal finances deteriorated after Corvinus' death, and border positions were undermanned. The greatest danger lay to the south, across the Sava–Danube line, where the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into the Balkans had accelerated during the fifteenth century. In 1456, Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1451–81), having claimed most of the lands of the last despot of Serbia, laid siege to the great citadel of Belgrade, where the Sava flows into the Danube. Unexpectedly, the garrison withstood the assault, aided by a motley crew of volunteers recruited by a crusading friar from Italy, the aged Giovanni Capistrano. In the 1460s, Corvinus seized several fortified towns south of the Danube. Behind this forward position he built a chain of fortresses along the Sava and the Danube. This defensive system forestalled further Ottoman advance to the north for half a century.¹¹

Sultan Suleyman the Lawgiver (r. 1520–66)¹² cast an eye toward Hungary. Upon his accession he ordered a mobilization for 1521. Whether he intended a major campaign or merely wanted to punish a diplomatic slight by Hungary is not clear. But when spies reported that the citadel was in no state to repel an attack, Belgrade became his target; once it fell, Suleyman's forces picked off other fortresses along the line. After this catastrophe, as before, Hungary's great men quarreled among themselves and with their young ruler, King Louis II Jagiello of Hungary and Bohemia. Suleyman ordered another mobilization for 1526. A papal legate to Hungary was ready to disburse money he had brought, if he could "get these people to adopt a serious plan." But he saw that "this king has no shoes," much less what was needed for a fortified camp south of Buda.¹³ On August 29, 1526, at Mohács on the Danube, ca. 70,000 Ottoman troops shattered a Hungary army of ca. 26,000; Louis II, fleeing the scene, drowned in a stream. Officials in Buda gathered what treasure they could, along with King Matthias' library, and fled the capital. The court reassembled in Posonia (Bratislava), under the capable direction of Louis II's young widow, Mary of Habsburg.

Louis II died childless. Mary's brother, Archduke Ferdinand, claimed the throne, based on a marriage treaty of 1515, by which Louis II was betrothed to Mary, and Ferdinand to Louis' sister Anna; the treaty stipulated that if either prince died without issue, his lands would pass to his brother-in-law. But in 1505, Hungary's estates declared that if their king died without a male heir, no foreigner could succeed him. The obvious Hungarian candidate was John Szapolyai, from the wealthiest family in the kingdom; as voivode of Transylvania he controlled a prosperous region. He was elected and crowned in November, in Székesfehérvár, Hungary's coronation city. Meanwhile, Bohemia's estates elected Ferdinand as king. In Posonia, Queen Mary, supported by "a small but influential group of pro-Habsburg magnates," convened a second Diet; Charles V had sent one hundred thousand gulden, and Ferdinand's envoys promised that

more assistance would be forthcoming. Thus, Ferdinand too was elected king. In 1527, his troops defeated his rival's forces near Tokaj. France and other anti-Habsburg powers sent encouraging words, but Szapolyai knew that only one prince could protect him. In 1528, his envoy concluded a treaty at the Sublime Porte. By Ottoman law, Suleyman was king of Hungary; he had defeated his rival in open battle, and Louis II died thereafter. But he now yielded the realm to Szapolyai and promised help against Ferdinand. Until the 1680s, Hungary would be divided into three parts; Ottoman Hungary, expanding from its strategic base in the center; Transylvania in the east; and Habsburg or royal Hungary in the west and north.

“Habsburg Monarchy” is the name historians give to the lands Ferdinand ruled; he was archduke of the Austrian duchies, king of Bohemia, including the modern Czech Republic and parts of Poland, and king in royal Hungary (including western Hungary and modern Croatia and Slovakia). Not long ago, historians saw Europe's early modern era as marked by the emergence of national monarchies like England, France, and Spain, pointing ahead to the nation states of modern times. But the Habsburg Monarchy was a “composite” state, with one ruler holding sway over different realms, each one maintaining its distinctive ways. Many historians now think that early modern Europe was characterized more by states of this kind than by incipient national states.¹⁴ Moreover, as Géza Pálffy suggests, the components of Ferdinand's realm were themselves composite: each of Austria's six duchies had its own estates, as did Bohemia's five provinces.¹⁵ These assemblies, usually dominated by the high aristocracy, granted the annual subsidies that made up most of Ferdinand's income; in the Austrian lands, they also collected the subsidies.¹⁶ Provincial elites were sensitive to wider needs, but they spoke for local interests; they were jealous of neighboring provinces, and suspicious of intervention from Vienna. Jagiellonian Hungary, where local elites also shared power with the king, had succumbed to Ottoman pressure. Could the Habsburg Monarchy fare any better?

Ferdinand had the advantage of possible support from the Holy Roman Empire. Walled cities, thickly clustered in south and central Germany, represented a landscape of wealth and power the Ottomans had not seen in Hungary or the Balkans. Moreover, the Imperial Diet had the capacity to raise contingents of troops or sums of money: according to an assessment agreed in 1512, subsidies voted by the Diet were collected by administrative districts called Circles (*Kreisen*).¹⁷ But Hungary lay beyond the empire's borders. This problem might not have been so difficult had it not been for rising religious tension. What might the Habsburgs do, Protestants wondered, if furnished with an army? In 1531, leading Protestant princes and cities formed the Schmalkaldic League, an alliance against possible Catholic aggression. Even though Ferdinand was elected king of the Romans in the same year, he found it prudent not to summon a Diet for ten years (from 1532 to 1542).

In terms of resources, Ferdinand's lands could not match the sultan's lands. The Monarchy had some 6.5 million people ca. 1550. Suleyman's empire had ca. twenty-five million people at his death in 1566. Ferdinand's ordinary revenues were about two million Venetian ducats; the Ottomans collected ten million ducats in the 1527 fiscal year. If Ferdinand habitually spent more than his income, the Ottoman treasury regularly booked a surplus. In 1528, the Ottoman military payroll included some 125,000 men, most of them commanded by the holders of *timars* (comparable to military fiefs). Elite salaried regulars—Janissary infantry and household cavalry—accompanied the sultan on campaign. Ottoman armies traveled with heavily guarded chests of silver *akçe*, to pay salaried troops their quarterly wages. In a Habsburg army on the march, most of the men were mercenaries. Keeping them paid depended on banker-lenders who could deliver funds at specified times. What might happen if pay ran short was made clear by the sack of Rome in 1527, when unpaid German and Spanish troops wreaked havoc in the capital of Catholicism.¹⁸ The studies in this book are set against a background of continuing Ottoman advance in Hungary and repeated Habsburg retreat.

A Losing Struggle in Hungary

In May 1529, Suleyman and his army set out from Istanbul, for Vienna. The siege that began in September lasted only three weeks, owing to overextended supply lines. The Diet had sent troops to Vienna, but Charles V was busy in Italy, fighting France's allies; if Milan or Genoa fell into the hands of hostile governments, communication between the dynasty's northern and southern lands would be jeopardized. As Charles wrote to Ferdinand, keeping the French out of Italy was more important than saving Vienna. Suleyman marched on Vienna again in 1532 but wasted time besieging a castle in western Hungary; by then, autumn rains had come, and he ordered a withdrawal. Meanwhile, a war flotilla had brought 80,000 Spanish and imperial troops down the Danube. Learning that he would not face the sultan, Charles V wanted to leave for Italy at once; he was persuaded that honor required that he at least enter Vienna and meet with his council of war.¹⁹

Although neither Ottoman expedition captured Vienna, both campaigns showed a logistical capacity not matched by any European army of the era. The marching distance from Istanbul to Vienna was roughly 950 miles. To the east, Suleyman's foe was Safavid Iran, a Shi'ite state. In 1548 and again in 1554 he marched his army across Anatolia to Tabriz, a trek of 1,150 miles, through barren and difficult country (Chapter 1). A Habsburg land army, smaller in size, might manage 350 miles. Habsburg armies marched on credit; commanders contracted with suppliers willing a promise of payment. By contrast, the Ottomans

had special units to repair bridges before a campaign, and arrange for storage of wheat, barley, flour, and biscuit in depots along the route. As needed, local suppliers were paid from the chests of silver traveling with the army. Into the eighteenth century, “The mobilization, storage and distribution of food supplies” remained an Ottoman strength.²⁰

European superiority in firearms was admitted by commanders on both sides. The Austrian Habsburgs equipped more and more of their infantry with firearms; from the 1570s they formed companies of dragoons, heavy cavalry with firearms, copying Spain and Italy.²¹ But the pitched battles in which firepower made a difference were rare along the Hungarian frontier. If the Ottomans steadily pushed the Habsburgs back, it was due to their superior siegecraft. A siege involved continuous entrenchment, edging closer to fortified walls. For well-disciplined Ottoman units, trenching was part of a day’s labor. But European mercenaries of these years regarded such work as beneath their dignity; local peasants had to be hired or press-ganged for the job. In 1556, delegates from Lower Austria presented the Diet of Regensburg with a list of 262 towns, castles, and manors taken by the Ottomans since 1526; only thirteen sites are known to have resisted for more than ten days. But the Ottomans rarely lost a town or a fortress to attack.²² In 1537, Hans Katzianer, a military enterpriser, proposed to reconquer Osijek, where a new Ottoman bridge crossed the Drava from Croatia into Hungary. Ferdinand had troops from the Habsburg lands join Katzianer’s mercenaries. But promised supplies were only partly delivered, and the quarreling commanders advanced without their supply train. Blocked from Osijek by Ottoman units, they pulled back into what turned out to be a swamp and then fled in disarray, leaving their artillery behind.²³

John Szapolyai died in July 1540, just after his wife gave birth to a son, John Sigismund, whom she hoped to see succeed his father. Seeing an opportunity, Ferdinand mobilized troops to besiege Buda in 1541, but Isabella held on until the sultan’s men arrived to disperse them. Suleyman now chose to exercise his rights as king of Hungary, relegating Isabella and her son to Transylvania. Buda became the center of a *paşaluk*, with 2,000 Janissaries, 6,000 cavalry, and a fleet of gunboats; fifteen subordinate *sançaks* would henceforth report to the *paşa* of Buda. This reorganization of central Hungary gave the Ottomans both a bulwark against Habsburg attack, and a launching pad for new attacks (Vienna was only about 125 miles away). The fall of Buda shocked Europe. For the first time, the Imperial Diet voted to send an army to Hungary if Habsburg lands also increased their contributions. In Prague, a first-ever assembly of all Ferdinand’s territories agreed to higher taxes. But in 1542, a splendid Habsburg-imperial army of 50,000 had to abandon its siege of Pest for want of supplies. In 1543, the Ottomans seized Székesfehérvár and Esztergom.²⁴

Charles V was then fighting in a war with France, but he promised—or so Hungarian envoys thought (**Chapter 2**)—to bring an army to Hungary. Instead,

he sent in 1545 an ambassador with credentials to negotiate on his and Ferdinand's behalf. Charles had often advised his brother to make peace with the sultan on the best terms he could get. At the Ottoman court, French diplomats sought to undermine a possible Habsburg–Ottoman accommodation (France had been the sultan's ally since 1526). But the eventual Treaty of Edirne in 1547, good for five years, allowed Ferdinand to hold his remaining lands in Hungary and Croatia, in return for an annual tribute of thirty thousand florins. For some years, Ferdinand and Charles were preoccupied by conflicts in Germany,²⁵ and Suleyman was busy on his eastern frontier. But Isabella's chief adviser had been conducting secret negotiations for a transfer of Transylvania to the Habsburgs; in return for lands elsewhere, Isabella agreed, and she and young John Sigismund went into exile in 1551. Suleyman reacted by sending an army; Timosoara (Temesvár) became a second *paşaluk* in Hungary. Northern Transylvania was briefly under Habsburg control, until Isabella and John Sigismund returned in 1556.²⁶

Since Ferdinand was already king of the Romans, he was de facto ruler of the empire after Charles abdicated in 1556. But there were no procedures for dealing with an abdication, and Ferdinand bided his time until the electoral princes—on whose support his authority in Germany depended—worked out how to “proclaim” him emperor in 1558. Meanwhile, Szigetvár in southwest Hungary, had recently escheated to the crown. To stop raids from Szigetvár, the *paşa* of Buda brought up a siege army in 1555; informed that it was a royal fortress, he withdrew. His successor, Ali Pasha Semiz, renewed the siege, but Habsburg forces fended off his attack. On behalf of the Porte, Ali Pasha now offered a new peace treaty, on condition that Szigetvár be razed. Before responding, Ferdinand took a full year to consult his estates, sharing copies of the diplomatic correspondence. All agreed: Szigetvár must not be abandoned. Although tension in Hungary remained high, a succession struggle between Suleyman's two sons distracted the Ottoman court. In 1559, Ferdinand's ambassador reported agreement on a treaty, but discussions then stalled. Two years later, Âli Paşa, now the Grand Vizier, offered the same terms with an added inducement: there would be a border commission to fix a boundary—a long-standing goal of Habsburg diplomacy. But in the treaty of 1562, the border-commission clause was dropped, at Vienna's behest. Why had Ferdinand changed his mind? It seems he opted for a forward defense: raids from Szigetvár and gunboats on the Danube were keeping Ottoman forces in Hungary off balance (Chapter 3).

The reign of Maximilian II (r. 1564–76) began with a problem in the east. John Sigismund, the voivode of Transylvania, sent troops to occupy Satu Mare (Szátmar), a key fortified town in Upper Hungary, the eastern salient of Habsburg territory. Maximilian raised an army, and got permission from his uncle, Philip II of Spain, to re-engage the services of Lazarus Schwendi, a former Austrian military official who was then serving as a Spanish commander in the Netherlands. Studying Habsburg maps, Schwendi saw that Satu Mare could best be reached

via Tokaj, a Transylvanian town; his troops captured Tokaj and then Satu Mare. Schwendi was also authorized to offer terms of peace, and an envoy sent by John Sigismund accepted the terms: he would marry Johanna of Austria, a sister of Maximilian, and Maximilian would retain Satu Mare and Tokaj. Some advisers thought Schwendi had exceeded his orders by taking Tokaj, but for Maximilian it was a rightful prize of war, since his foes had started the fighting. Turkish troops now joined the Transylvanians, making gains in Habsburg territory. Ottoman officials were then busy with the ongoing siege of Malta,²⁷ but they could if needed plan a second grand enterprise. In a letter of July or August 1565, Suleyman scolded Maximilian for seizing lands that Almighty God had given to him; he threatened war unless Tokaj and other areas were returned. Yet Maximilian's advisers thought His Majesty could not have peace with honor if he gave up all that was gained in a war started by his enemies. Was there hope for peace? Maximilian's ambassador, now in Vienna, thought an *uti possidetis* agreement was still possible. But as fighting continued, Suleyman decided by early November to order a mobilization. The war of 1566 was the aged sultan's last campaign. The main Ottoman army conquered Szigetvár while another force took Gyula, a key fortress southeast of Pest. The Habsburgs kept Tokaj, but at the cost of suffering their worst-yet defeat in Hungary (Chapter 4).

The Ottomans now directly controlled 40 percent of the Kingdom of Hungary, including the Danube corridor, from Esztergom north of Buda down to Belgrade. Before the end of 1566, Maximilian sent envoys to learn the terms on which Sultan Selim II (r. 1566–74) might agree to peace. The answer was that Maximilian could have peace, provided that a border commission settled boundary disputes in keeping with an Ottoman tax register known as the Book of Halil Beg. For the Ottoman administration, Hungary was a testing ground for the use of official documentation to consolidate military gains.²⁸ In the broader picture, the Ottomans wanted peace in Hungary because more vital areas needed attention. Grand Vizier Mehmed Pasha Sokolović (1566–79) organized a relief expedition to aid a Muslim prince in Sumatra against Portuguese Christians (1567); he appeased a rebellion in Yemen (1567–72); he oversaw the conquest of Venetian Cyprus (1570); and after the disaster at Lepanto in 1571, he presided over a recovery of Ottoman naval power.²⁹ In Hungary, Habsburg diplomats, despite their misgivings, accepted the terms on offer, leading to the 1568 Treaty of Edirne. From now until the outbreak of a war in 1593, Hungary had twenty-five years of “peace,” but this peace was more like “little war” (*Kleinkrieg*); on both sides, border lords asserted their claims and forced peasants to pay dues and perform labor services.³⁰

For the Habsburgs, some assurance against another invasion of Hungary had seemed worth almost any price. But the treaty and the letters of confirmation from both sovereigns were in Latin and Turkish, with no common text. According to the Turkish texts (as the Habsburg court learned, not soon enough),

His Majesty had “conceded” to the sultan all towns and villages listed in the Book of Halil Beg. But Hungarian magnates had contrary claims, and, unlike Selim II, Maximilian II could not easily dismiss or dispossess unruly border lords. These men were the pillars of his authority in Hungary, and some among them had already regained their lands by submitting on favorable terms to the sultan.³¹ Habsburg diplomats at the Porte spent the rest of Maximilian’s reign pleading for revision of the 1568 treaty. They finally got a new treaty, signed in November 1576, just as Rudolf II (r. 1576–1609) began his reign. This treaty stipulated, as in previous Turkish texts, that a border commission would take the Book of Halil Beg as the basis for discussion; but new wording noted that His Majesty disputed some of its provisions. Habsburg authorities hoped this concession would suffice to assure Hungary’s great families that His Majesty had not abandoned them (Chapter 8).

By now, the Habsburgs had been losing ground in Hungary for half a century. Yet bitter experience can be a good teacher. As described in the Epilogue, Rudolf II and his brothers presided over consultations that produced a comprehensive plan for defense, leading eventually to a hardening of Europe’s land frontier against the Ottomans.³² The essays here focus on the previous history of defeat, a history that likely made hard decisions more palatable.

Themes of the Book

The Imbalance of Power

What were the aims of the Ottoman Empire in Europe? This debate began in the sixteenth century and still continues. Was Ottoman aggression egged on by the perfidious French, as the Habsburgs insisted? Or, as the French claimed, did His Christian Majesty’s alliance with the Turk protect Christians in the east, and restrain the ambition of the Habsburgs in Europe?³³ For some Ottomanists, Hungary was a shield against attack from the west, leaving the empire free for affairs in the east and in the Mediterranean. For others, Ottoman Buda was, as Belgrade had been, a platform for further expansion.³⁴ For the Austrian estates, busy resisting interference from Vienna, the Ottomans were not a direct threat until the fall of Buda in 1541. In Hungary, scholars provide new material to show the Habsburgs’ role as protectors of the kingdom, but popular opinion, reflecting an older nationalist view, blames a foreign dynasty for stifling Hungary’s development.³⁵

Recent discussion of the Habsburg–Ottoman conflict highlights cultural history. For example, an important collection from 2005 does not discuss the fighting but has a number of essays on European images of the Turk. To the extent there is now a trend away from military history, current events have not been

without influence. The lead essay in the 2005 volume references the question of Turkey's accession to the European Union, then under consideration.³⁶ Since September 11, 2001, scholars have been wary of broaching topics that may seem to suggest an inveterate enmity between the Islamic world and the Christian west. One may now find a phrase like "Turkish threat" in scare-quotes, as if even in former times the danger was not real, but merely conjured up by those in power.³⁷ The most helpful studies are those that combine old and new emphases, recognizing the importance of propaganda in mobilizing opinion, while keeping in mind that the endemic frontier warfare of those times was not a phantom of the imagination.³⁸ Here, the essays in **Part I** discuss Habsburg efforts to find a way forward, against a superior power.

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Chapter 1. "Foreign Correspondence: European Accounts of Sultan Suleyman I's Persian Campaigns, 1548 and 1554," *Turkish Historical Review* 6 (2015): 194–219.

No European power of this era could march a huge army across 1,000 miles of rough country. To consolidate his eastern frontier, Sultan Suleyman did it twice, as reported by the *Relazione* of a Venetian merchant, letters from French ambassadors accompanying the campaigns, and the dispatches of Archduke Ferdinand's envoy at the Porte. These sources show how Ottoman logistics managed the crossing of the Armenian mountains, and how traveling treasure—chests of silver *akçe* and a large sum of gold—kept the troops content and paid for an army's rations.

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Chapter 2. "Charles V Reneges? A Campaign in Hungary That Never Was," (unpublished essay from 2011).

As the Habsburgs lost ground in Hungary, Archduke Ferdinand hoped for help from his brother, who presented himself as the champion of Christendom. But Charles V had reasons for avoiding major commitment in the east, and he had learned to be suitably vague in responding to demands for his attention. As Ferdinand's position worsened, Charles met with envoys from Hungary. Did he promise to send troops or even come in person, as the envoys thought? The ambassador he sent had instructions to negotiate with the Ottomans for peace.

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Chapter 3. "The Road to Szigetvár: Ferdinand I's Defense of his Hungarian Border, 1548–1564," *Austrian History Yearbook*, XLIV (2013): 17–36.

The Treaty of 1547 left a no-man's land between lines of fortresses. Ottoman raiders, better at siege tactics, pushed their line of control forward. To put an end to *Kleinkrieg*, Ferdinand's ambassadors vainly sought negotiations on a fixed border. But when the Ottomans actually proposed the idea in 1561, Ferdinand declined. Evidently, he now hoped to forestall another invasion into Hungary by

keeping the Ottomans off balance, with gunboats on the Danube, and a reliable ally, Nikola IV Zrinski, in command at the key fortress of Szigetvár.

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Chapter 4. “Tokaj, 1565: A Habsburg Prize of War and an Ottoman *Casus Belli*,” in Pál Fodor, ed., *The Battle for Central Europe: The Siege of Szigetvár* (Brill: Leiden: 2019), 359–76.

When John Sigismund Szapolyai of Transylvania invaded Hungary, a Habsburg counterattack seized Tokaj, at a key crossing of the Tisza River. Suleyman demanded the return of Tokaj. But His Majesty’s honor would not abide giving up what he had gained in a war started by his foes; signals from the Porte were ambiguous, and Maximilian II chose to play for time. In November 1565, Suleyman decreed a mobilization in the spring. In the campaign of 1566, the Habsburgs held on to Tokaj, but lost two anchor fortresses and large amounts of territory.

Negotiating from a Position of Weakness

Like the history of conflict between states, the history of diplomatic relations has in recent decades shifted its emphasis from power politics to the politics of culture. Instead of examining diplomatic correspondence for hints about the strategies of rival powers, scholars explore these sources for clues about patterns of human contact that were still cultivated across hostile borders.³⁹ There have also been valuable publications of Habsburg sources for Habsburg–Ottoman relations,⁴⁰ and more such projects are underway.⁴¹ For the rest, historians of Habsburg rule depend on material preserved in the “Turcica” section of the Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna.⁴²

Sixteenth-century Habsburg sovereigns nurtured vain hopes of recovering by diplomacy what had been lost by war, but they also supported their ambassadors at the Porte with large budgets (Chapter 6). During the seventeenth century, when Vienna focused on European affairs, the Habsburgs were content to be represented by mere “residents,” who struggled with small budgets.⁴³ Whether ambassadors or residents, Austrian diplomats lived in the “ambassadors’ caravanserai” (*elci han*), a building owned and maintained by the Ottoman state.⁴⁴ Habsburg diplomacy can usefully be seen in a broader context. If the Habsburgs had the weaker hand in dealing with the Ottomans, so did every other European power with representation at the Porte. The small republic of Dubrovnik/Ragusa, an Ottoman tributary state, used diplomacy to maintain the privileges on which its trade depended (Chapter 5). Venice had at one time a stronger navy than the sultan did. If Venice and Spain could set aside their mutual animosity, as they briefly did in the Holy League of 1571, their combined war fleets were still more than a match for the Ottoman navy.⁴⁵ But in Venetian Dalmatia, continually

threatened by neighboring Bosnia, the Republic was compelled to recognize its dependence on Ottoman good will (Chapter 7).

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Chapter 5. “The Grand *Vezir* and the Small Republic: Dubrovnik and Rüstem Paşa, 1544–1561,” *Turkish Historical Review*, I (2010): 196–214.

As an Ottoman tributary, Dubrovnik/Ragusa extended its trading network across the Balkans. But since Ottoman officials frowned at the low customs rate Ragusans enjoyed, the republic depended on support from the highest level of the government to maintain its privileges. During his long tenure as grand vizier, Rüstem Pasha frequently intervened on Ragusa’s behalf. In return, he requested and received shipments of the finest Venetian silks and woolens, likely passed on to Ottoman workshops, or marketed in the east by his household trading network.

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Chapter 6. “The Ambassador as Third Party: Busbecq’s Summary Account for the Year 1559,” *Acta Histriae* 22 (2014), 1–12.

Habsburg diplomats at the Porte played from a weak hand, but a good ambassador still found ways to advance his sovereign’s interests. In 1559, Busbecq was asked to send a treaty that would have constrained Vienna’s freedom of action. He asked to carry the treaty himself; as he expected, permission to depart was denied (it would not do to have it bruited about that Ferdinand’s ambassador was detained against his will). As needed, he also reinterpreted his instructions from Vienna or used his own credit for added gifts to the vizier inclined to peace.

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Chapter 7. “A Castle in Dalmatia: Zemunik in the Veneto-Ottoman Peace Negotiations of 1573–1574,” *Journal of Opinions, Ideas, and Essays* (JOIE), 1 (2013), no. 7.

The Hispano–Venetian victory at Lepanto in 1571 did not restore what Venice lost in the Cyprus War of 1570 to 1573. In Dalmatia, losses included Zemunik Castle, defending rural territory on which the port of Zadar depended. Venice’s failure to recover it in peace negotiations betokened a larger shift. For the remaining decades of Venice’s eastward trade, connections with Istanbul would require not only avoiding war at sea, but also opening a land route across the Balkans, in cooperation with local Jewish merchants and officials of Ottoman Bosnia.

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Chapter 8. “The Logic of *Kleinkrieg*: The ‘Book of Halil Beg’ in Habsburg-Ottoman Diplomacy, 1550–1576,” *Austrian History Yearbook*, 52 (2021), 85–101.

In 1588, Maximilian II accepted a conqueror's peace in 1568: border disputes would be regulated by an Ottoman tax register, claiming for the sultan land still held by Habsburg subjects. Vienna discovered that the Turkish text had His Majesty "ceding" all such lands. After years of trying, Habsburg ambassadors finally got a minor revision, indicating that His Majesty disputed certain of the tax register's details. This provision may have assured loyalist magnates that they could still pursue their claims. The 1576 treaty of peace was also a charter for *Kleinkrieg*.

Dynastic and Composite States

As a body politic, the Habsburg Monarchy has not gotten much respect. One common view is that it lacked "the centralization and absolutist efficiency" developed by other great powers of the era. By French standards, it was "a structurally immature, almost backward state, where corporate and provincial particularism were important well into the eighteenth century."⁴⁶ One sees here an often-presumed equivalence between modernity and centralization, and between centralization and efficiency. But the more recent opinion is that early modern states were at best partly centralized. In Spain, if Castile was often sympathetic to the king's need for subsidies, Aragon, with four provincial estates, was rather more stubborn.⁴⁷ For French historians, a strong monarchy did not exclude local interests, it rather enlisted their cooperation. The king's army functioned by a collaboration between officials and private contractors.⁴⁸ For a student of international relations. Europe after Peace of Westphalia (1648) was made up of dynastic agglomerations, not nation states.⁴⁹ Among historians of state finance, many now restrict the definition of modernity to the "fiscal state," one with uniform taxes collected by national officials under strict rules; England by ca. 1815 was the earliest example.⁵⁰ More generally, H. G. Koenigsberger and Charles Tilley have been influential critics of the tendency to anticipate history by treating early modern states as nation states in formation.⁵¹

Composite states were not necessarily weak. In the Dutch Republic, the six other provinces of the Union struggled to rein in Holland's ambitions. But Holland's apparent selfishness—securing its own borders first—helped preserve a fledgling Republic in the early stages of the Revolt against Spain.⁵² The famously fractious Commonwealth of Poland–Lithuania has been seen as weak against its foes. But in successive Northern Wars (1558–1721), Polish cavalry was at times more than a match for western-trained musketeers.⁵³ The Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy have both been seen as weak states, but here too recent studies point in a different direction.

In the nineteenth century, Leopold von Ranke presented the empire as Germany's failed attempt to create a national state. According to Peter Wilson, Ranke has cast a long shadow. In English-language historical writing, the

decentralized Empire is often used as a foil for Europe's more cohesive states, like France and England.⁵⁴ The revisionist view, summarized by Wilson, stresses an institutional development that was "primarily driven by the need to foster consensus," not by efforts by the center to reach into the periphery.⁵⁵ Between 1495 and 1507, Maximilian I and the estates agreed to a series of reform proposals. The imperial diet would henceforth have power to impose taxes, levied pro rata on the estates or territories of the empire. Taxes were collected by regional administrative bodies (*Kreisen*), representing the estates. The Diet gave Maximilian the support he wanted for his wars in Italy, but imperial taxes could also serve other purposes. By 1555, a total of 4.5 million Rhine gulden in *Türkensteuer* (Turk taxes) was voted for the defense of Hungary.⁵⁶ The 1555 Peace of Augsburg lowered the religious temperature between Lutherans and Catholics. From 1556 to 1607, the Diet raised thirty-one million gulden for the frontier. In turn, Vienna kept its promise to use the money for frontier fortresses. Of the sums due, the amount actually collected has been calculated at 70 percent for ca. 1550, and 88 percent for the last quarter of the century.⁵⁷ A sixteenth-century government that achieved such collection rates was not ineffective.

As for the Habsburg Monarchy, more studied for the period after 1650 than before, the provincial estates have usually been seen as obstacles to effective government. But economic historians have noted the importance of the estates in promoting local interests. One scholar suggested that the possible benefits of a decentralized fiscal structure were worth considering.⁵⁸

William Godsey has now done so for Lower Austria. The estates paid its share of the army's wages, they also helped in recruiting men, and in billeting and supplies for the troops. Most importantly, as the Monarchy's debt expanded, so did debts carried by the estates as guarantors of low-interest loans. In 1572 Lower Austria had a debt of six million gulden; in 1719, the province paid three million in debt-service charges, indicating a capital debt twenty or twenty-five times larger. In sum "the importance of corporate credit for Habsburg public finance can hardly be overestimated."⁵⁹

Here, two chapters address Protestant views of the Turkish wars. Lutheranism had spread rapidly in the Empire and in Habsburg lands, and Habsburg proposals for defending Hungary needed Lutheran support. But Reformed Protestantism was also taking hold in the Empire, threatening the Lutheran-Catholic equilibrium achieved at Augsburg in 1555. Luther favored armed resistance to the Ottomans, provided it was not understood as a holy war. But John Calvin hardly ever mentioned wars in the east, and sixteenth-century Reformed opinion on the Turks is seldom discussed.⁶⁰ **Chapter 9** looks at the correspondence of Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, with reference to Maximilian II's efforts to obtain election as king of Poland-Lithuania. **Chapter 10** discusses a long circular letter to the Austrian estates, written at His Majesty's request by David Ungnad, his ambassador to the Porte. Ungnad, a leading Lutheran layman,

wove Lutheran themes into his plea for higher taxes for the Hungarian frontier. Finally, [Chapter 11](#) contrasts the consultative character of the sixteenth-century Habsburg Monarchy with the top-down command structure of an empire whose core territories were governed by the sultan’s appointees, not by local elites. A contrast of this kind may not be as valid beyond the sixteenth century, but its salience is not limited to the two states discussed here. The Habsburg Monarchy shared a number of features with other composite states in contemporary Europe, just as the Ottoman Empire shared common features with the other two “gunpowder empires” of the contemporary Islamic world.⁶¹

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[Chapter 9](#). “Reformed Perspectives on the Habsburg-Ottoman Conflict, 1564–1576: Notes on the Correspondence of Beza, Bullinger, and Gwalther,” in Amy Nelson Burnett, Kathleen M. Comerford, Karin Maag, eds., *Politics, Gender and Belief: Essays on the Long-Term Impact of the Reformation* (Geneva: Droz, 2014), 73–94.

For Catholics, the Ottoman wars were Crusades; for Protestants, no war could be holy, but princes had a duty to resist the Turks. Lutheranism was strong in Habsburg Austria, Calvinism in Habsburg Hungary. This essay asks how Reformed leaders in Switzerland viewed the conflict. In the common view, the Turk was God’s instrument to punish Catholic idolatry. But Theodore Beza, based on his reading of things, supported Maximilian II’s candidacy for the throne of Poland–Lithuania; for the moment, he was that rarest of men, a pro-Habsburg Calvinist.

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[Chapter 10](#). “Advice from a Lutheran Politique: Ambassador David Ungnad’s Circular Letter to the Austrian Estates, 1576,” in Victoria Christman, Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer, eds., *Cultural Shifts and Transformations in Reformation Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 193–209.

Austria’s aristocrats were mostly Lutheran, like David Ungnad, ambassador to the Porte (1573–78). In 1576, at Maximilian II’s request, he sent a circular letter to the estates, urging approval of higher taxes. This essay explores what Ungnad said between the lines, to fellow Lutherans. Catholic Austria was harsh for true Christians, yet not the worst of worlds. Under Ottoman rule, the venerable Greek Orthodox Church had “collapsed,” as church offices were sold to the highest bidder. It seems Ungnad was a kind of man surely to be found but seldom discussed, a Lutheran politique.

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[Chapter 11](#). “The Habsburg Monarchy in Conflict with the Ottoman Empire, 1526–1593: A Clash of Civilizations,” *Austrian History Yearbook*, XLVI (2015): 1–28.

The Ottoman government levied taxes by decree and had a top-to-bottom chain of military command. The Habsburgs had recalcitrant estates and commanders with regional agendas. Yet by engaging local elites in planning, the Monarchy would in time effectively mobilize the resources of its provinces and stabilize the frontier, from around 1580. This contrast between government by decree and government by consultation, valid for the sixteenth century, means that the Habsburg–Ottoman conflict of this period may be seen as a clash of civilizations.

Notes

1. Studies in Spanish and Italian focus on European–Ottoman conflicts in the Mediterranean.
2. Cf. Braudel, *La Méditerranée*.
3. Fichtner, *Ferdinand I*; Rady, *The Habsburgs*, 78–80; Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*, 57–58.
4. Wilson, *Heart of Europe*.
5. According to the Golden Bull of Eger, issued in 1356 by Emperor Charles IV.
6. There were six duchies in total: Tyrol (Innsbruck) was inherited by a Habsburg prince in 1369, and Upper Austria (Linz) was later recognized as a separate territory, distinct from Lower Austria (Vienna).
7. The duchy of Burgundy was reclaimed by France at the death in 1477 of Mary's father, Charles the Bold.
8. Parker, *Emperor*.
9. Alvarez-Nogal, "La Demanda," 47–82; Rauscher, *Zwischen Ständen und Gläubigern*, 199–201.
10. Kohler, *Ferdinand I*.
11. For this paragraph and the next, Ágoston, *Last Muslim Conquest*, [Chapter 5](#); Tracy, *Balkan Wars*, [Chapter 1](#).
12. This was his Ottoman sobriquet. In the west he has become known as "the Magnificent."
13. Legate Andrea dal Burgo to Jacopo Sadoletto, Pray, *Epistolae Procerum*, vol. 1, Letters 90, 91, and 93.
14. Elliott, "Europe of Composite Monarchies," 3–24. Cf. Poland–Lithuania, the Holy Roman Empire, the Swiss Confederation, the Low Countries provinces, and, in Spain, the kingdom of Aragon, made up of four realms.
15. Pálffy, *Kingdom of Hungary*. Bohemia's lands were Bohemia proper, Moravia, Silesia, and Upper and Lower Lusatia.
16. Mensi, *Geschichte der direkten Steuern*.
17. Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 397–420.
18. Ágoston, *Last Muslim Conquest*, [Chapter 8](#), "Resources and Military Power;" Tracy, *Balkan Wars*, 377–79; and Parker, *Emperor*, [Chapter 1](#). For the sack of Rome, Parker, *Emperor*, [Chapter 7](#).
19. Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 124–25; Parker, *Emperor*, 14–15; Tracy, *Emperor Charles V*, 138–41.
20. Ágoston, *Last Muslim Conquest*, 296; for details, see the chapter on logistics in Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare*.
21. Ágoston, "Firearms and Military Adaptation," 85–124.
22. Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan*, 192–95.

23. Ágoston, “Habsburgs and Ottomans,” 126–41; Tracy, *Balkan Wars*, 120–22.
24. Fodor, “Ottoman Policy towards Hungary,” 105–69; Ágoston, *Last Muslim Conquest*, 205; Tracy, *Balkan Wars*, 145–47. Pest is across the Danube from Buda.
25. Severi, “‘Denari in loco delle terre,’” 211–56. Charles V defeated the Schmalkaldic League in 1547 but suffered a reverse in 1552. By the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, Lutheran territories had the same rights in the empire as Catholic territories.
26. Imber, *Ottoman Empire*, Chapter 4, “The Road to Istanbul,” Osborni, “Le royaume des Szapolyai,” 65–77. The adviser was Friar George Martinuzzi.
27. The Knights of Malta, inveterate raiders of Ottoman territory by sea, held off the siege.
28. Ferguson, *Proper Order of Things*, Chapter 4.
29. Casale, *Ottoman Age of Exploration*; Samardžić, *Mehmed Sokolovitch*.
30. Pálffy, *Hungary between Two Empires*, 22.
31. For Ottoman accommodation of local interests in border regions, Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, Chapter 3.
32. Pálffy, “Die Türkenabwehr der Habsburger Monarchie,” 79–108, and Štefanec, *Država ili ne*, 139–94, 273–315. For a brief summary, Tracy, *Balkan Wars*, 272–80.
33. Tracy, *Emperor Charles V*, Chapter 7.
34. Murphey, “Süleyman I,” 197–221; Fodor, “Ungarn und Wien,” 45–70.
35. Pálffy, *Hungary Between Two Empires*, 31, 35.
36. Kurz et al., *Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburger Monarchie*.
37. Hladky and Stehlik, “The ‘Turkish Threat,’” 28–41.
38. E.g., Heppner and Barbarics-Hermanik, *Türkenangst und Festungsbau*; Borromeo, Piatti, and Weidinger, *Europa Cristiana e Impero Ottomano*. See also Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*, 58: In an age when powerful states were inclined to expand against their neighbors, “Some fear of further Ottoman expansion was no doubt reasonable, especially in view of the sheer quantities of manpower and resources that Suleyman could muster.”
39. E.g., Eisendle, Suner, and Weidinger, *Culture and Diplomacy*.
40. Džaja and Weiss, *Austro-Turcica*.
41. For reference to editions now underway, Cziráki, “Old and New Trends,” 368.
42. Documents from the “Turcica” section of the Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv (abbreviated HHStA-Turcica) are cited in Chapters 1–4, 6, 8, and 10 and 11.
43. For the sixteenth century, Graf, *Der Preis der Diplomatie*; for the seventeenth century, Meinenberger, *Johann Rudolf Schmid*, 79–80.
44. Suner, “From Elci Hani to Palais Yenikoi,” 3–14.
45. Capponi, *Victory of the West*.
46. Hochedlinger, *Austria’s Wars of Emergence*, 7.
47. Comin, “Spain: From Composite Monarchy,” 233–64.
48. Parrott, *Richelieu’s Army*; Parrott, *The Business of War*.
49. Nexon, *Struggle for Power*, 67.
50. O’Brien, “Nature and Historical Evolution,” 408–46.
51. Elliott, “Europe of Composite Monarchies,” 5–8, cites Koenigsberger, *Dominium Regale*; Nexon, *Struggle for Power*, 68–71, cites Koenigsberger and Tilley, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*.
52. Tracy, *Founding of the Dutch Republic*.
53. Frost, *Northern Wars*, 55–64.
54. E.g., “The Holy Roman Empire, whose king was chosen by a college of princes, eventually fragmented into various ministates”: Sumption, “Winner of the Game of Thrones.”

55. Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 8–10. Von Ranke (d. 1886) is considered the founder of history as a modern discipline.
56. Wilson, *Heart of Empire*, 402–8.
57. Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 448–51.
58. Pieper, “Financing an Empire,” 164–90.
59. Godsey, *Sinews of Habsburg Power*, 1–37 (the quote, p. 26), 129–49.
60. E.g., Ryad, “Rather Turkish than Papist,” 714–36, deals mainly with the seventeenth century. *Liever Turks dan Paaps* was a slogan of the Dutch Revolt against Catholic Spain.
61. The Safavids of Iran, and the Mughals in India. See Hodgson, *Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times*.