

# Suleiman: The Last Years

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## OGIER GHISELIN DE BUSBECQ

There are many contemporary accounts of the Sultan Suleiman. He himself kept a detailed diary; there are accounts and descriptions by court figures and official Turkish historians; and there are reports of European diplomats at the Porte.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of revealing the character and motives of the sultan the Turkish sources are limited. Suleiman's diary is prosaic and factual and not very revealing of the man who wrote it. The accounts of courtiers and official chroniclers are marred by excessive adulation of the sultan and hence unreliable. Western diplomats' accounts, while sometimes useful, are more often too closely related to their own policy ends. An exception is the account of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq.

Busbecq was a noble Fleming, born in 1522, who spent most of his life as a professional diplomat, much of it in the service of King Ferdinand, the brother of the Hapsburg Emperor Charles V, (Charles's regent for the eastern Hapsburg lands and his successor as Holy Roman Emperor. Busbecq was hastily summoned back to Vienna in 1554 from London, where he had represented Ferdinand at the marriage of Queen Mary Tudor and Prince Philip of Spain. Relations with the Turks had taken a turn for the worse. Since the Turkish siege of Vienna had failed in 1529, Turkish relations with the Hungarians and Hapsburgs had swung between truce and open warfare, with first one and then the other gaining a momentary advantage, the preponderance usually on the side of the Turks. Ferdinand had succeeded in 1551 in taking Transylvania. Suleiman was furious, accusing Ferdinand of bad faith and duplicity, and threatened full-scale war. The only hope Ferdinand had of preserving the precarious position he held in Hungary lay in the skill and tact of his diplomats. He asked Busbecq to go to Constantinople as his ambassador; Busbecq agreed. It was not an enviable assignment. His immediate predecessor, Giovanni Maria Malvezzi, had spent the last two years locked in a Turkish prison, under threat of torture and mutilation in punishment for his king's perfidy.

Busbecq went to Constantinople, where he was to spend most of

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<sup>2</sup>The seat of Ottoman government, "The Sublime Porte" was the sultan's palace in Constantinople, named after its gate (port).—Ed.

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the next eight years, with occasional journeys back to Vienna to consult with his government. The substance of his mission and the account of the sights and people he saw—including the sultan—are all contained in a series of “Turkish Letters” that he wrote to an old friend, fellow diplomat, and fellow Fleming Nicolas Michault, Lord of Indeveldt. Busbecq’s account is extremely candid and perceptive. It reveals that Suleiman saw himself not only as a participant in European affairs but as the prime participant, the arbiter of Europe’s destiny, as of Asia’s. It also reveals a man used to the exercise of absolute power, impatient with the delays and disappointments of diplomacy and the deceitfulness of diplomats and their political masters—a man nearing the end of his reign and his life, and uncertain about his place in history.

In his account Busbecq has already described the long and harrowing trip to the East. Now he has arrived and been summoned to see the sultan at Amasia, the capital of Cappadocia.

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On our arrival at Amasia we were taken to call on Achmet Pasha (the chief Vizier) and the other pashas—for the Sultan himself was not there in the town—and commenced our negotiations with them touching the business entrusted to us by King Ferdinand. The Pashas, on their part, apparently wishing to avoid any semblance of being prejudiced with regard to these questions, did not offer any strong opposition to the views we expressed, and told us that the whole matter depended on the Sultan’s pleasure. On his arrival we were admitted to an audience but the manner and spirit in which he listened to our address, our arguments, and our message, was by no means favourable.

The Sultan was seated on a very low ottoman, not more than a foot from the ground, which was covered with a quantity of costly rug and cushions of exquisite workmanship; near him lay his bow and arrows. His air, as I said, was by no means gracious, and his face wore a stern, though dignified, expression.

On entering we were separately conducted into the royal presence by the chamberlains, who grasped our arms. This has been the Turkish fashion of admitting people to the Sovereign ever since a Croat, in order to avenge the death of his master, Marcus, Despot of Servia, asked Amurath<sup>3</sup> for an audience, and took advantage of it to slay him. After having gone through a pretence of kissing his hand, we were conducted backwards to the wall opposite his seat, care being taken

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<sup>3</sup>Amurath is a variant spelling of Murad I (1360–1389). The incident referred to never actually occurred.—Ed.

that we should never turn our backs on him. The Sultan then listened to what I had to say; but the language I held was not at all to his taste, for the demands of his Majesty breathed a spirit of independence and dignity, which was by no means acceptable to one who deemed that his wish was law; and so he made no answer beyond saying in a tetchy way, 'Giusel, giusel,' i.e. well, well. After this we were dismissed to our quarters. . . .

By May 10 the Persian Ambassador had arrived, bringing with him a number of handsome presents, carpets from famous looms, Babylonian tents, the inner sides of which were covered with coloured tapestries, trappings and housings of exquisite workmanship, jewelled scimitars from Damascus, and shields most tastefully designed; but the chief present of all was a copy of the Koran, a gift highly prized among the Turks; it is a book containing the laws and rites enacted by Mahomet, which they suppose to be inspired.

Terms of peace were immediately granted to the Persian Ambassador with the intention of putting greater pressure on us, who seemed likely to be the more troublesome of the two; and in order to convince us of the reality of the peace, honours were showered on the representative of the Shah. . . .

Peace having been concluded with the Persian, as I have already told you, it was impossible for us to obtain any decent terms from the Turk; all we could accomplish was to arrange a six months' truce to give time for a reply to reach Vienna, and for the answer to come back.

I had come to fill the position of ambassador in ordinary; but inasmuch as nothing had been as yet settled as to a peace, the Pashas determined that I should return to my master with Solyman's letter, and bring back an answer, if it pleased the King to send one. Accordingly I had another interview with the Sultan. . . . Having received the Sultan's letter, which was sealed up in a wrapper of cloth of gold, I took my leave; the gentlemen among my attendants were also allowed to enter and make their bow to him. Then having paid my respects in the same way to the Pashas I left Amasia with my colleagues on June 2. . . .

You will probably wish me to give you my impressions of Solyman.

His years are just beginning to tell on him, but his majestic bearing and indeed his whole demeanour are such as beseeem the lord of so vast an empire. He has always had the character of being a careful and temperate man; even in his early days, when, according to the Turkish rule, sin would have been venial, his life was blameless; for not even in youth did he either indulge in wine or commit those unnatural crimes which are common among the Turks; nor could those who were disposed to put the most unfavourable construction on his acts bring anything worse against him than his excessive devo-

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tion to his wife, and the precipitate way in which, by her influence, he was induced to put Mustapha to death; for it is commonly believed that it was by her philtres and witchcraft that he was led to commit this act. As regards herself, it is a well-known fact that from the time he made her his lawful wife he has been perfectly faithful to her, although there was nothing in the laws to prevent his having mistresses as well.<sup>4</sup> As an upholder of his religion and its rites he is most strict, being quite as anxious to extend his faith as to extend his empire. Considering his years (for he is now getting on for sixty) he enjoys good health, though it may be that his bad complexion arises from some lurking malady. There is a notion current that he has an incurable ulcer or cancer on his thigh. When he is anxious to impress an ambassador, who is leaving, with a favourable idea of the state of his health, he conceals the bad complexion of his face under a coat of rouge, his notion being that foreign powers will fear him more if they think that he is strong and well. I detected unmistakable signs of this practice of his; for I observed his face when he gave me a farewell audience, and found it was much altered from what it was when he received me on my arrival. . . .

This was only the first of several journeys back to Vienna between 1554 and 1562. Busbecq finally departed Constantinople for good in August of 1562.

I commenced my wished-for journey, bringing with me as the fruit of eight years' exertions a truce for eight years, which however it will be easy to get extended for as long as we wish, unless some remarkable change should occur. . . .

The truce Busbecq had negotiated entailed, on Austria's part, the recognition of all Ottoman conquests and the independence of Transylvania under Ottoman suzerainty. Ferdinand was also obliged to continue to pay tribute. But it was a peace that spared Hungary the agony of yet another Turkish invasion and spared the strapped Austrian monarchy the need to mount yet another expensive military defense. Busbecq's account of his successful negotiation is followed by his judicious assessment of the situation between Suleiman and Ferdinand.

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<sup>4</sup>Suleiman was indeed devoted to Roxelana, who enjoyed the unusual status of his lawful wife and lived not in the harem but in the imperial palace. She did exercise a baneful influence over the sultan and may even have influenced his decision to execute his eldest son Mustapha, who had rebelled against him. However, deep suspicion of a sultan's sons and even their murder by their father was a common occurrence among the Ottoman rulers. All of Suleiman's brothers, for example, had been killed by Selim.—Ed.

Against us stands Solyman, that foe whom his own and his ancestors' exploits have made so terrible; he tramples the soil of Hungary with 200,000 horse, he is at the very gates of Austria, threatens the rest of Germany, and brings in his train all the nations that extend from our borders to those of Persia. The army he leads is equipped with the wealth of many kingdoms. Of the three regions, into which the world is divided, there is not one that does not contribute its share towards our destruction. Like a thunderbolt he strikes, shivers, and destroys everything in his way. The troops he leads are trained veterans, accustomed to his command; he fills the world with the terror of his name. . . . Nevertheless, the heroic Ferdinand with undaunted courage keeps his stand on the same spot, does not desert his post, and stirs not an inch from the position he has taken up. He would desire to have such strength that he could, without being charged with madness and only at his own personal risk, stake everything on the chance of a battle; but his generous impulses are moderated by prudence. He sees what ruin to his own most faithful subjects and, indeed, to the whole of Christendom would attend any failure in so important an enterprise, and thinks it wrong to gratify his private inclination at the price of a disaster ruinous to the state. He reflects what an unequal contest it would be, if 25,000 or 30,000 infantry with the addition of a small body of cavalry should be pitted against 200,000 cavalry supported by veteran infantry. The result to be expected from such a contest is shown him only too plainly by the examples of former times, the routs of Nicopolis and Varna, and the plains of Mohacz, still white with the bones of slaughtered Christians. . . .

It is forty years, more or less, since Solyman at the beginning of his reign, after taking Belgrade, crushing Hungary, and slaying King Louis, made sure of obtaining not only that province but also those beyond; in this hope he besieged Vienna, and renewing the war reduced Güns, and threatened Vienna again, but that time from a distance. Yet what has he accomplished with his mighty array of arms, his boundless resources and innumerable soldiery? Why, he has not made one single step in Hungary in advance of his original conquest. He, who used to make an end of powerful kingdoms in a single campaign, has won, as the reward of his invasions, ill-fortified castles or inconsiderable villages, and has paid a heavy price for whatever fragments he has gradually torn off from the vast bulk of Hungary. Vienna he has certainly seen once, but as it was for the first, so it was for the last time.

Three things Solyman is said to have set his heart on, namely, to see the building of his mosque finished (which is indeed a costly and beautiful work), by restoring the ancient aqueducts to give Constantinople an abundant supply of water, and to take Vienna. In two of

these things his wishes have been accomplished, in the third he has been stopped, and I hope will be stopped. Vienna he is wont to call by no other name than his disgrace and shame.

## The Young Suleiman

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ROGER B. MERRIMAN

From the foregoing account of an ailing and world-weary Suleiman at the end of his reign, with his ambitions for the conquest of Europe thwarted, we turn back to the beginning of his reign and the bright promise which that conquest seemed to hold. The account is by the American scholar Roger B. Merriman.

Merriman is best known for his massive four-volume work *The Rise of the Spanish Empire in the Old World and in the New*, published between 1911 and 1934. It remains the preeminent work on its subject. In the course of his research for that book, Merriman became interested in not only the Spanish but the Austrian Hapsburgs, and their imperial problems, not the least of which was the Turks. Then, in the early 1940s, he undertook to finish a book on Suleiman the Magnificent that had been left unfinished by a close friend and Harvard colleague, Archibald Coolidge, on his death. Merriman updated the research, reworked parts of the manuscript, and rewrote other parts entirely. The result is his *Suleiman the Magnificent 1520-1566*, which appeared in 1944 and which is still the most comprehensive and authoritative biography of Suleiman in English.

After sketching in the background of Suleiman's reign, dealing with his boyhood, youth, and accession to the throne, and his first two major campaigns against Belgrade and Rhodes, Merriman takes up the story of the campaign of Mohács and Vienna, between 1526 and 1529, the culminating events of Suleiman's assault on Europe.

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On Monday (reckoned a lucky day) the twenty-third of April, 1526, Suleiman, accompanied by Ibrahim<sup>5</sup> and two other vizirs, left Con-

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<sup>5</sup>Ibrahim Pasha was an early favorite of Suleiman whom he had rapidly advanced to the office of Grand Vizier and to whom he granted extraordinary powers. Ibrahim's personal ambition, however, finally became a threat even to the sultan and, encouraged by Roxelana, Suleiman had him put to death in 1536.—Ed.

stantinople at the head of more than 100,000 men with 300 cannon. The Sultan's diary gives many details of the advance, which continued for more than eighty days before contact was established with the enemy. . . .

The two middle weeks of August were the really critical period of the campaign. The Hungarian king, council, magnates, and generals had been wrangling at Buda and Tolna over the question of the defence of the realm; while Tömöri,<sup>6</sup> from across the Danube, kept sending them messages of the continued advance of the Turks which he was impotent to impede. The obvious thing for the Hungarians to do was, of course, to move southward and defend the strong line of the Drave, but petty jealousies prevented this. The most they would consent to do was to advance to the plain of Mohács, on the west side of the Danube, some thirty miles to the north of the point where the Drave unites with it. The inhabitants of Esseg, on the south bank of the Drave, realized that they had been abandoned, and made haste to send the keys of their town to the Sultan, in token of submission, as he slowly approached in a driving rain. When Suleiman reached the Drave, he could scarcely believe his eyes when he found that its northern bank had been left undefended, but he was prompt to avail himself of a God-given opportunity. On August 15 he "gave orders to throw a bridge of boats across this river and personally supervised the work." As the Turkish historian Kemal Pasha Zadeh rapturously declares, "They set to work without delay to get together the materials necessary for this enterprise. All the people expert in such matters thought that the construction of such a bridge would take at least three months, but yet, thanks to the skilful arrangements and the intelligent zeal of the Grand Vizir, it was finished in the space of three days." (The Sultan's diary makes it five.) After the army had crossed over, Esseg was burned and the bridge destroyed. It was a bold step to take; for though the invaders were thereby partially protected from the arrival of Hungarian reënforcements from Croatia, they were also deprived of all means of escape in case of defeat by their Christian foes. . . .

Meantime the Hungarians were slowly assembling on the plain of Mohács. King Louis had a bare 4,000 men with him when he arrived there; but fresh detachments came continually dribbling in, and others were known to be rapidly approaching. But they were a motley host, whose mutual jealousies made it wellnigh impossible for them effectively to combine. There was much difficulty over the choice of a

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<sup>6</sup>Paul Tömöri, the Archbishop of Kalocsa, was a warlike cleric who had been assigned the task of defending the Turkish frontier and who was the most experienced of the Hungarian commanders.—ED.

commander-in-chief. King Louis was obviously unequal to the task; the Palatine Stephen Báthory had the gout; and so it was finally decided to give the place to Archbishop Tömöri, the memory of whose past successes in border warfare against the Moslems was enough to stifle his own protestations that he was not the man for the task. Soon after his appointment, and when the Turks had already crossed the Drave, the Hungarians held a council of war to determine the strategy most expedient for them to adopt. The more cautious of them advocated a retreat toward Buda-Pesth; then the Turks would have no choice but to follow, for Buda was their announced objective and they were staking everything on success. Every day's march forward would take them further from their base, while the Hungarians if they retired would be sure to be joined by reënforcements. John Zápolya<sup>7</sup> was but a few days distant with 15,000 to 20,000 men; John Frangipani was coming up from Croatia; the Bohemian contingent, 16,000 strong, was already on the western frontier of the realm. But unfortunately the bulk of the Hungarians, including Tömöri himself, refused to listen to such reasoning as this. They were filled with an insane overconfidence. The gallant but rash and turbulent Magyar nobility clamored for an immediate fight. They distrusted the king. Many of them were hostile to Zápolya, and unwilling to have him share in the glory of the victory which they believed certain. It was accordingly decided to give battle at once; and the Hungarians, who could choose their own ground, elected to remain on the plain of Mohács, in a place which would give them full play for their cavalry. Apparently they forgot that the enemy, whose horsemen were much more numerous than their own, would derive even greater advantage from the position they had chosen.

The relative size of the two armies which were about to encounter one another has been a fertile source of discussion ever since. One thing only is certain; the contemporaneous estimates on both sides are ridiculously exaggerated. Tömöri told King Louis, on the eve of the battle, that the Sultan had perhaps 300,000 men; but that there was no reason to be frightened by this figure, since most of the Turks were cowardly rabble, and their picked fighting-men numbered only 70,000! Even if we accept the statement that Suleiman left Constantinople at the head of 100,000 men, we must remember that less than one-half of them were troops of the line. It seems likely that his losses through skirmishing and bad weather, as he advanced, must have more than counterbalanced his gains through reënforcements re-

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<sup>7</sup>John Zápolya was the ruler of Transylvania and sometime claimant to the Hungarian throne.—ED.



ceived along the route. If we put the Janissaries<sup>8</sup> at 8,000, the regular cavalry of the bodyguard at 7,000, the Asiatic feudal cavalry at 10,000, the European at 15,000, and the miscellaneous levies at 5,000, we get a total of 45,000 Turkish fighting troops, besides the irregular and lightly armed *akinji*,<sup>9</sup> possibly 10,000 to 20,000, who hovered about the battlefield but were never expected to stand the charge of regular soldiers. It is also very doubtful if Suleiman still had anywhere near the 300 cannon with which he is said to have left Constantinople in the previous April.

The actual size of the Hungarian army is almost equally difficult to estimate—principally because of the reënforcements which continued to arrive until the day of the fight. In the grandiloquent letter which the Sultan despatched a few days after the battle to announce his victory to the heads of his different provinces, he puts the number of his Christian foes at approximately 150,000, but it seems probable that the true figures were less than one-fifth as large: perhaps 25,000 to 28,000 men, about equally divided between cavalry and infantry, and 80 guns. Part of these troops were well drilled professional soldiers, many of them Germans, Poles, and Bohemians; there was also the Hungarian national cavalry, made up of the brave but utterly undisciplined nobles. And they had, besides, large numbers of heavy-armored wagons, which could be chained together to make rough fortifications, or even pushed forward, like the modern tank, to pave the way for an infantry or a cavalry charge. . . .

The plain of Mohács, some six miles in length, is bounded on the east by the Danube. At the northern end is the town, while to the south and west there is a line of low hills, then covered with woods, which furnished an admirable screen for the Turkish advance. Apparently neither side expected a combat till well after noon of the day on which it occurred, and actual fighting did not begin till after three. The story of the details of the battle itself varies widely in the different contemporaneous accounts that have come down to us, but the main outlines seem reasonably clear. The combat opened with a tremendous charge of the heavy-armed Hungarian cavalry against the centre of the Turkish line emerging from the woods. It pierced the opposing ranks, and soon after appeared to be so decisively successful that orders were given for a general advance of all the Hungarian forces. But the Turkish centre had been withdrawn on purpose, in

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<sup>8</sup>The Janissaries were the primary infantry force of the Ottomans, made up of Christian boys raised as Moslems in strict military discipline.—ED.

<sup>9</sup>*Akinji* were irregular cavalry forces.—ED.

order to lure their enemies on to their destruction. By the time they had reached the Janissaries and the Sultan's standard, they were held up. There were furious hand-to-hand combats between the Christian leaders and the members of Suleiman's bodyguard; at one moment Suleiman himself was in grave danger. But the Turkish artillery was far more skilfully handled than that of their opponents; the Hungarians were mowed down in droves; most important of all, the concentration of the Christians in the centre gave their numerous foes a splendid opportunity, of which they were prompt to take advantage, to outflank their enemies, particularly on the westward. Within an hour and a half, the fate of the battle had been decided. The Hungarians fled in wild disorder to the north and east. Such, apparently, are the principal facts. But as we are following the story of the battle from the Turkish standpoint, it will be worth while to supplement these data by a few passages from the history of Kemal Pasha. He gives Ibrahim all the credit for the feint by which the Christians were enticed to disaster. "The young lion," he declares, "no matter how brave, should remember the wisdom and experience of the old wolf. . . . When the Grand Vizir seized his redoubtable sword, ready to enter the lists, he looked like the sun, which sheds its rays on the universe. In combat, he was a youth, ardent as the springtime: in council, he was an old man, as experienced as Fortune in numerous vicissitudes." When the battle began, he continues, "the air was rent with the wind of the fury of the combatants; the standards shone forth in the distance; the drums sounded like thunder, and swords flashed like the lightning. . . . While the faces of the miserable infidels grew pale and withered before they felt the flame of the blades . . . the cheeks of our heroes, drunk with lust for combat, were tinged with the color of roses. . . . With all these murderous swords stretched out to lay hold on the garment of life, the plain seemed like a fiend with a thousand arms; with all these pointed lances, eager to catch the bird of life in the midst of slaughter, the battlefield resembled a dragon with a thousand heads." And then, when the rout began, he concludes: "At the order of the Sultan the fusiliers of the Janissaries, directing their blows against the cruel panthers who opposed us, caused hundreds, or rather thousands of them, in the space of a moment, to descend into the depths of Hell."

The slaughter which followed the battle was indeed fearful. The Turks took no prisoners, and few of the defeated escaped. The Sultan's diary is even more than usually laconic. For August 31 it reads "The Emperor, seated on a golden throne, receives the homage of the vizirs and the beys: massacre of 2000 prisoners: the rain falls in torrents"; and for September 2: "Rest at Mohács; 20,000 Hungarian infantry and 4000 of their cavalry are buried." On this occasion his

figures seem to be corroborated, in round numbers at least, by the Christian accounts of the disaster. Mohács indeed was the "tombeau de la nation hongroise";<sup>10</sup> never has a single battle proved so fatal to the life of a people. In addition to the annihilation of its army, almost all of its leaders had perished. King Louis, after fighting bravely, turned to flee when all was lost, but his horse, in trying to climb the steep bank of a small stream, fell backwards into the waters below and buried his rider under him. Tömöri and his second in command were also killed, together with two archbishops, five bishops, many magnates, and the greater part of the Hungarian aristocracy; the flower of the nation, both lay and clerical, had been sacrificed on the fatal day. Suleïman's announcement of his victory to his governors is couched in more expansive language than is his diary, but the impression conveyed in the following sentences from it is substantially correct, as seen from the standpoint of the Turks. "Thanks be to the Most High! The banners of Islam have been victorious, and the enemies of the doctrine of the Lord of Mankind have been driven from their country and overwhelmed. Thus God's grace has granted my glorious armies a triumph, such as was never equalled by any illustrious Sultan, all-powerful Khan, or even by the companions of the Prophet. What was left of the nation of impious men has been extirpated! Praise be to God, the Master of Worlds!"

After Mohács organized resistance practically ceased. On the day following the battle John Zápolya with his army reached the left bank of the Danube; but he made haste to withdraw as soon as he learned of the catastrophe. On September third the Ottoman army resumed its advance; on the tenth it entered Buda. Apparently the keys of the town had been sent out in advance to Suleïman in token of submission by those who had been unable to flee (Kemal Pasha assures us that only "humble folk" had remained within the walls), and the Sultan, in return promised them that they should be spared the horrors of a sack. But his troops got out of hand, and he was unable to keep his word. As his diary tersely puts it (September 14), "A fire breaks out in Buda, despite the efforts of the Sultan: the Grand Vizir seeks in vain to extinguish it": as a matter of fact the entire city was burnt to the ground with the exception of the royal castle, where Suleïman himself had taken up his residence. There the Sultan found many treasures which he carried back with him to Constantinople. . . .

In the midst of the celebrations of his victory he was seriously considering the question of the disposition he should make of the prize that he had won. . . . On the whole it seemed wiser to be satis-

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<sup>10</sup>"Tomb of the Hungarian nation."—Ed.

fied with what had already been achieved. To quote Kemal again, "The time when this province should be annexed to the possessions of Islam had not yet arrived, nor the day come when the heroes of the Holy War should honor the rebel plains with their presence. The matter was therefore postponed to a more suitable occasion, and heed was given to the sage advice; 'When thou wouldst enter, think first how thou wilt get out again.'"

On September 13, accordingly, the Sultan ordered the construction of a bridge of boats across the Danube from Buda to Pesth, and seven days later the vanguard of the Turkish army passed across it. On the night of the twenty-third the bridge apparently broke into three parts, two of which were swept away, so that the last detachments had to be ferried over in boats. The next day Pesth was burnt, and on the morrow the Ottoman army started homeward. . . .

In the year following his return from Mohács, his chief immediate care was the suppression of two insurrections in Asia Minor. The first, in Cilicia, was put down by the local authorities. The second, in Karamania and the districts to the east of it, was more serious; and Ibrahim had to be despatched with a force of Janissaries to insure the final defeat of the rebels in June, 1527. Meantime the Sultan had remained at Constantinople; partly, perhaps, because he did not wish to lower his own prestige in the eyes of his subjects by seeming to be obliged to deal personally with revolts; but more probably because he was principally interested in the course of events in Hungary. . . .

By midsummer of 1528 . . . it must have been reasonably clear that Suleiman soon intended to launch a third great expedition up the Danube, this time as the ally, or perhaps better the protector, of Zápolya, against Ferdinand and the power of the House of Hapsburg. There is no reason to be surprised that he delayed his departure until the following year. The season was already too late to embark on an enterprise whose ultimate goal, Vienna, was so remote. Moreover the Sultan fully realized that in challenging Ferdinand he was also indirectly bidding defiance to the Emperor Charles V. On May 10, 1529, however, he left Constantinople, at the head of a much larger army than that of 1526. The Christian chroniclers talk vaguely of 250,000 to 300,000, though it is doubtful if there were more than 75,000 fighting men, and it seems clear that four-fifths of them were cavalry. Ibrahim was again seraskier,<sup>11</sup> and the artillery is given, as before, at 300 guns. The rains, which in the preceding campaign had been a nuisance, were this year so continuous and torrential that they seriously affected the outcome of the campaign. Suleiman did not reach

<sup>11</sup>The title of the Turkish Minister of War, who was also the army commander.—Ed.

Vienna till a month later than he expected, and that month may well have made just the difference between failure and success. The Sultan's comments on the bad weather in his diary are constant and bitter. At Mohács, on August 18, he had been joined by Zápolya, whose prospects had speedily revived when it became known that he had won the favor of Suleiman. He brought with him 6,000 men. The Sultan received him with great pomp, and presented him with four robes of honor and three horses caparisoned with gold. But Suleiman, in his diary, takes great pains to point out that he regarded him merely as a vassal. He explains that the gifts were only bestowed in recognition of the voivode's<sup>12</sup> homage; and he emphasizes the fact that Zápolya twice kissed his hand. At Buda a feeble resistance was offered by a few hundred Austrian mercenaries; but they soon surrendered after a promise of good treatment, which was shamefully violated by the Janissaries. Zápolya was permitted to make a royal entrance there on September 14; but he was obviously dominated and controlled by the Turkish soldiers and officials who escorted him. . . . September 18 the *akinji* swarmed across the Austrian frontier, and swept like a hurricane through the open country. On the twenty-seventh the Sultan himself arrived before Vienna. Two days later the investment was complete.

The siege of Vienna appeals strongly to the imagination. Never since the battle of Tours, almost precisely eight centuries before, had Christian Europe been so direfully threatened by Mohammedan Asia and Africa. Had the verdict on either occasion been reversed, the whole history of the world might have been changed. And the cause of the Moslem defeat in both cases was fundamentally the same; the invaders had outrun their communications. This is well demonstrated in the case of Vienna by the fact that the long distances and heavy rains had forced the Turks to leave behind them the bulk of their heavy artillery, which had been such a decisive factor in the siege of Rhodes. The lighter cannon, which was almost all that they succeeded in bringing with them, could make little impression on the city walls. Only by mining operations could they hope to open a breach for a general assault. . . .

The Sultan's headquarters were his splendid red tent, pitched on a hill, three or four miles away. Mining and countermining operations were vigorously pushed during the early days of October. Several times the besiegers were encouraged to launch assaults, which were invariably repulsed. On the other hand, the constant sorties of the garrison were generally unsuccessful. October 12 was the critical day

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<sup>12</sup>A Slavic word denoting the military commander or governor of a territory.—Ed.

of the siege. On that morning the walls had been breached by mines, and the Turks had delivered the most furious of their attacks. Only with great difficulty had it been beaten off, and the garrison was deeply discouraged; that very afternoon it despatched the most pressing of its messages to hasten the arrival of relief. But the Turks were in even worse case. At the Divan which they held that same day, the preponderance of opinion was in favor of withdrawal. The season was ominously late; supplies were getting short; the Janissaries were murmuring; powerful Christian reënforcements were known to be at hand. Ibrahim besought his master to go home. One more last attack was launched on October 14; but despite the unprecedented rewards that had been offered in case it should be successful, it was delivered in such half-hearted fashion that it was foredoomed to failure from the first. That night the Turks massacred some 2000 of the prisoners that they had taken from the Austrian countryside; they burnt their own encampment; on the fifteenth they began to retire. Their retreat was cruelly harassed by enemy cavalry, and truly horrible weather pursued them all the way to Constantinople. It was cold comfort that Zápolya came out from Buda as the Sultan passed by to compliment his master on his "successful campaign." All that the Sultan had "succeeded" in doing was to expel Ferdinand from his Hungarian dominions; and we need not take too seriously the statement in his diary that since he had learned that the archduke was not in Vienna, he had lost all interest in capturing the place! The fundamental fact remained that Suleiman had been beaten back before the walls of the Austrian capital by a force a third the size of his own, or perhaps less. His prestige, about which, like all Orientals, he was abnormally sensitive, had suffered a serious blow.

## Suleiman the Statesman: An Overview

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HALIL INALCIK

Despite the best efforts of Merriman, in the previous selection, to write his account "from the Turkish standpoint," it is inescapably Eurocentric, as was that of Busbecq. Fortunately, we have an assessment of Suleiman and his achievements by "the leading Turkish his-

torian of the Balkans today,"<sup>13</sup> Halil Inalcik, from his *The Ottoman Empire, The Classical Age 1300–1600*. Inalcik is not only familiar with the works of Turkish historians and what he calls the "unusually rich" Ottoman archives, but with the standard western accounts of the wars and politics of the Reformation. For the first time, he weaves together the two traditions and shows us the extent to which Suleiman was regarded not only as a dangerous scourge by the West but as a counter in the western concept of the balance of power. He also shows us the extent to which Suleiman himself was aware of western politics and how that awareness affected his policies. It is a brilliant achievement of historical synthesis.

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In 1519 the Habsburg Charles V and Francis I of France were candidates for the crown of the Holy Roman Empire, and both promised to mobilize all the forces of Europe against the Ottomans. The Electors considered Charles V more suited to the task, and shortly after the election, in March 1521, these two European rulers were at war with each other. Europe, to the great advantage of the Ottomans, was divided, and Süleymân I chose this time to march against Belgrade, the gateway to central Europe. Belgrade fell on 29 August 1521. On 21 January 1522 he captured Rhodes, the key to the eastern Mediterranean, from the Knights of St. John.

When Charles V took Francis prisoner at Pavia in 1525, the French, as a last resort, sought aid from the Ottomans. Francis later informed the Venetian ambassador that he considered the Ottoman Empire the only power capable of guaranteeing the existence of the European states against Charles V. The Ottomans too saw the French alliance as a means of preventing a single power dominating Europe. Francis I's ambassador told the sultan in February 1526 that if Francis accepted Charles' conditions, the Holy Roman Emperor would become 'ruler of the world'.

In the following year Süleymân advanced against Hungary with a large army. The Ottoman victory at Mohács on 28 August 1526, and the occupation of Buda, threatened the Habsburgs from the rear. The Ottomans withdrew from Hungary, occupying only Srem, and the Hungarian Diet elected John Zapolya as King. At first the Ottomans wished to make Hungary a vassal state, like Moldavia, since it was considered too difficult and too expensive to establish direct Ottoman rule in a completely foreign country on the far side of the Danube. But the Hungarian partisans of the Habsburgs elected

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<sup>13</sup>Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1977), p. 305.

Charles V's brother, Archduke Ferdinand, King of Hungary, and in the following year he occupied Buda and expelled Zapolya. Süleymân again invaded Hungary, and on 8 September 1529 again enthroned Zapolya in Buda as an Ottoman vassal. Zapolya agreed to pay an annual tribute and accepted a Janissary garrison in the citadel. Although the campaigning season was over, Süleymân continued his advance as far as Vienna, the Habsburg capital. After a three-week siege, he withdrew.

In 1531 Ferdinand again entered Hungary and besieged Buda. In the following year Süleymân replied by leading a large army into Hungary and advancing to the fortress of Güns, some sixty miles from Vienna, where he hoped to force Charles V to fight a pitched battle. At this moment Charles' admiral, Andrea Doria, took Coron in the Morea from the Ottomans. Realizing that he now had to open a second front in the Mediterranean, the sultan placed all Ottoman naval forces under the command of the famous Turkish corsair and conqueror of Algiers, Hayreddin Barbarossa, appointing him *kapudan-i deryâ*—grand admiral—with orders to cooperate with the French. Since 1531 the French had been trying to persuade the sultan to attack Italy and now they sought a formal alliance. In 1536 this alliance was concluded. The sultan was ready to grant the French, as a friendly nation, freedom of trade within the empire. The ambassadors concluded orally the political and military details of the alliance and both parties kept them secret. Francis' Ottoman alliance provided his rival with abundant material for propaganda in the western Christian world. French insistence convinced Süleymân that he could bring the war to a successful conclusion only by attacking Charles V in Italy. The French were to invade northern Italy and the Ottomans the south. In 1537 Süleymân brought his army to Valona in Albania and besieged Venetian ports in Albania and the island of Corfu, where a French fleet assisted the Ottomans. In the following year, however, the French made peace with Charles. Francis had wished to profit from the Ottoman pressure by taking Milan, and when the emperor broke his promise he reverted to his 'secret' policy of alliance with the Ottomans.

In the Mediterranean Charles captured Tunis in 1535, but in 1538 Barbarossa defeated a crusader fleet under the command of Andrea Doria at Préveza, leaving him undisputed master of the Mediterranean.

When Francis again approached the sultan in 1540 he told Charles' ambassadors, come to arrange a peace treaty, that he was unable to conclude a peace unless Charles returned French territory. There was close cooperation between the Ottomans and the French between 1541 and 1544, when France realized that peaceful negotiations would not procure Milan.



In 1541 Zapolya died, and Ferdinand again invaded Hungary. Süleymân once again came to Hungary with his army, this time bringing the country under direct Ottoman rule as an Ottoman province under a beylerbeyi.<sup>14</sup> He sent Zapolya's widow and infant son to Transylvania, which was then an Ottoman vassal state. Since 1526 Ferdinand had possessed a thin strip of Hungarian territory in the west and north, to which the Ottomans, as heirs to the Hungarian throne, now laid claim. In 1543 Süleymân again marched into Hungary with the intention of conquering the area, and at the same time sent a fleet of 110 galleys, under the command of Barbarossa, to assist Francis. The Franco-Ottoman fleet besieged Nice and the Ottoman fleet wintered in the French port of Toulon. In return, a small French artillery unit joined the Ottoman army in Hungary. This cooperation, however, was not particularly effective. With the worsening of relations with Iran Süleymân wanted peace on his western front. As in 1533, he concluded an armistice with Ferdinand, which included Charles. According to this treaty, signed on 1 August 1547, and to which Süleymân made France a party, Ferdinand was to keep the part of Hungary already in his possession in return for a yearly tribute of thirty thousand ducats.

Three years later war with the Habsburgs broke out again when Ferdinand tried to gain control of Transylvania. The Ottomans refused him, and in 1552 established the new *beylerbeylik* of Temesvár in southern Transylvania.

When the new king, Henry II, came to the throne in France he realized the need of maintaining the Ottoman alliance in the struggle against Charles V. The French alliance was the cornerstone of Ottoman policy in Europe. The Ottomans also found a natural ally in the Schmalkalden League of German Protestant princes fighting Charles V. At the instigation of the French, Süleymân approached the Lutheran princes, urging in a letter that they continue to cooperate with France against the pope and emperor. He assured them that if the Ottoman armies entered Europe he would grant the princes amnesty. Recent research has shown that Ottoman pressure between 1521 and 1555 forced the Habsburgs to grant concessions to the Protestants and was a factor in the final official recognition of Protestantism. In his letter to the Protestants, Süleymân intimated that he considered the Protestants close to the Muslims, since they too had destroyed idols and risen against the Pope. Support and protection of the Lutherans and Calvinists against Catholicism would be a keystone of Ottoman policy in Europe. Ottoman policy was thus intended to main-

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<sup>14</sup>A governor of a Turkish province.—Ed.

tain the political disunity in Europe, weaken the Habsburgs and prevent a united crusade. Hungary, under Ottoman protection, was to become a stronghold of Calvinism, to the extent that Europe began to speak of 'Calvino-turcismus'. In the second half of the sixteenth century the French Calvinist party maintained that the Ottoman alliance should be used against Catholic Spain, and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of the Calvinists infuriated the Ottoman government.

It should be added that at first Luther and his adherents followed a passive course, maintaining that the Ottoman threat was a punishment from God, but when the Turkish peril began to endanger Germany the Lutherans did not hesitate to support Ferdinand with military and financial aid; in return they always obtained concessions for Lutheranism. Ottoman intervention was thus an important factor not only in the rise of national monarchies, such as in France, but also in the rise of Protestantism in Europe.

Charles V, following the example of the Venetians, entered into diplomatic relations with the Safavids of Iran, forcing Süleymân to avoid a conflict with the Safavids, in order not to have to fight simultaneously in the east and west. . . .

When the Ottomans renewed the war in central Europe, the Persians counterattacked, and in 1548 Süleymân, for the second time, marched against Iran. This war lasted intermittently for seven years. By the Treaty of Amasya, signed on 29 May 1555, Baghdad was left to the Ottomans.

These Ottoman enterprises resulted, in the mid-sixteenth century, in a new system of alliances between the states occupying an area stretching from the Atlantic, through central Asia, to the Indian Ocean. In this way the European system of balance of power was greatly enlarged. . . . In an inscription dating from 1538 on the citadel of Bender;<sup>15</sup> Süleymân the Magnificent gave expression to his world-embracing power:

I am God's slave and sultan of this world. By the grace of God I am head of Muhammad's community. God's might and Muhammad's miracles are my companions. I am Süleymân, in whose name the *hutbe*<sup>16</sup> is read in Mecca and Medina. In Baghdad I am the shah, in Byzantine realms the Caesar, and in Egypt the sultan; who sends his fleets to the seas of Europe, the Maghrib<sup>17</sup> and India. I am the sultan who took the crown and throne of Hungary and granted them to a humble slave.

<sup>15</sup>A Turkish fortress in Moldavia.—Ed.

<sup>16</sup>The sermon following the Friday prayer in which the sultan's name was mentioned.—Ed.

<sup>17</sup>An Arabic term for North Africa, from Egypt to the Atlantic.—Ed.

The voivoda Petru<sup>18</sup> raised his head in revolt, but my horse's hoofs ground him into the dust, and I conquered the land of Moldavia.

But in his final years international conditions became unfavourable to the Ottomans and Süleymân's attempt at world-wide domination met its first decisive failures.

The Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 established Spanish hegemony in Europe, and as France was drawn into civil war she ceased to be the Ottomans' main ally in European politics. The withdrawal from Malta in 1565 and Süleymân's last Hungarian campaign in 1566 marked the beginning of a halt in the Ottoman advance into central Europe and the Mediterranean.

## Review and Study Questions

1. From these selections, what sort of picture do you derive of Suleiman?
2. In the face of the overwhelming superiority of the Turks, how do you account for Suleiman's failure to conquer Europe?
3. Why were the Christian forces so disastrously defeated at the battle of Mohács?
4. Why did Suleiman fail in his siege of Vienna?
5. What role did Suleiman play in European diplomacy?

## Suggestions for Further Reading

There are no Turkish sources for Suleiman available in English. See two bibliographical articles by Bernard Lewis, "The Ottoman Archives," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1951), 139–55, and "The Ottoman Archives," *Report on Current Research* (Washington, 1956), 17–25. Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300–1600*, tr. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (New York and Washington: Praeger, 1973), excerpted for this chapter, is the only narrative history in English based on Turkish sources. Of some value, however, are the relevant chapters in L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York: Rinehart, 1958), the standard work on the subject. Also useful is Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1977),

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<sup>18</sup>The last independent ruler of Moldavia, more commonly known as the pretender Jacob Basiliscus.—ED.

although it is organized topically and geographically and is of limited value as a historical work. A classic work of the same sort is A. H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913). Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition* (New York: Knopf, 1972) is a useful brief general survey of Ottoman history and culture. A useful and interesting article is Merle Severy, "The World of Suleyman the Magnificent," *National Geographic Magazine*, 172, No. 5 (November 1987), 552–601. Another interesting source, excerpted in this chapter, is C. T. Forster and F. H. B. Daniell, *The Life and Letters of Ghiselin de Busbecq* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971 [1881]); it contains an account on Suleiman by a Western diplomat.

Of the biographies of Suleiman, the best, even though it is a generation old, is still Roger B. Merriman, *Suleiman the Magnificent 1520–1566* (New York: Cooper Square, 1966 [1944]), excerpted for this chapter. Of considerable value is a popular work by Antony Bridge, *Suleiman the Magnificent, Scourge of Heaven* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1983), mainly because it focuses on the role of Suleiman in Europe; unfortunately, it has no critical apparatus and only a perfunctory bibliography. Less valuable are the relevant chapters in Noel Barber, *The Lords of the Golden Horn: From Suleiman the Magnificent to Kamal Atatürk* (London: Macmillan, 1973). This work is simplistic and journalistic, emphasizing the most sensational episodes in Turkish domestic history.

Because of this chapter's emphasis on Suleiman's European ambitions, the standard histories of Europe in the Age of the Reformation are of some value. Two of the best are Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1973) and A. G. Dickens, *Reformation and Society in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1966). Two topical works are also recommended: Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1937) and S. A. Fischer-Galati, *Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism 1521–1555* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).