A Szigeti Veszedelem and the Turkish Wars

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Miklós Zrínyi's epic poem recounts history with a particular slant, presenting the events of the Turkish defeat at Szigetvár in 1566 as a fight between the forces of good and evil. He uses epic conventions to present a tale of a clash between the Turks and the Hungarians. While on the surface the Hungarians seem to be defeated, the real victory lies with them: militarily, the Turks withdraw; the resistance of the fort has stopped their advance to Vienna and the West; politically, the resistance of the Hungarian nobility is a noble goal which ensures the continued existence of the nation; morally, the Christians triumph over the forces of evil represented by the Turks.

In the winter of 1645-46, Miklós Zrínyi (1620-1664), known as Zrínyi the poet, wrote an epic on the deeds of his great-grandfather, Miklós Zrínyi, the hero of Szigetvár. Alluding to his earlier love poems in the opening lines, Zrínyi soon established the more serious and more martial nature of this work: "Arms, and the hero I sing, who dared face the might of the Turks, the anger of Suleiman." (Fegyvert s vitézt éneklek, török hatalmát/Ki meg merte várni Szuliman haragját) (O.Sz. I.2). The self-conscious imitation of Vergil is a calculated one, for Zrínyi purposely set out to make his epic, which he entitled Osidionis Szigetiane, an example to his compatriots.[*] Homer and Vergil had praised the great men of their nations: he would do likewise and thus prompt his countrymen to action against both the Turks and their own lethargy. The time to expel the Turks is at hand, he suggests; if the Hungarians will unite, they can do this through their own efforts. As he was to argue in his extensive correspondence and more explicitly polemical prose works, the Hungarians could count on no one but themselves (Összes művei, Hadtudományi munkái). By following the example of Zrínyi, the hero of Szigetvár and of his brave soldiers, they can accomplish this great goal. The development of each incident, the delineation of each character, the commentary of the heavenly participants, the poet's skillfully interwoven allusions to contemporary events and persons all serve this purpose.

Zrínyi was also careful to emphasize that he was writing a "historia." In the foreword he alludes to his disagreement with the chroniclers Miklós Istvánffy and Johannes Sambucus in the issue of the manner of Suleiman's death. While it is a generally accepted historical fact that the Turkish sultan died of the plague as reported by the chroniclers, Zrínyi defends his departure from their accounts. Citing family traditions and other chronicles, Croatian, Turkish and Italian, he hopes to add to verisimilute by citing that Suleiman actually died at the hands of Zrínyi. This

[*] The translation would be The Siege of Sziget. In Hungarian the work is generally known as A Szigeti Veszedelem. The only English translation, now being published by Catholic University Press and prepared by Laszló Kőrössy, translates it quite accurately as The Peril of Sziget.

is, however, mostly window dressing to justify the poetic truth of the event: "However it was, Sultan Suleiman died there; that is certain" (Művei 1:10). Poetically and dramatically it is fitting that the two great antagonists die in the final battle, and it is also fitting that the hero of the work kills the great protagonist. Fidelity to this universal truth is the boon he also asks of his Muse, the Virgin Mary. Thus, an examination of the epic as the *purposeful* retelling of a historical event is valid (O. Sz. I.5). My purpose here is to show how history and literature interact to present the story of the siege: the historical background is important, but from the literary standpoint, it is the appropriation of historical facts which are interesting. In the tradition of the classical epic, and to a lesser extent the Renaissance works of Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), Zrínyi is not writing history so much as extolling resistance to the Turks in the long wars against them. Tasso's Jerusalem Liberated (1574) introduced Christian doctrine and Christian supernatural elements, as well as the tales of Medieval Romance to the classical epic. It, of course, depicted the struggle for Jerusalem against Muhammadans. Zrínyi also chronicles the clash of Christian and Muslim forces, but in addition, he is calling the Imperial forces to literary account for their failure to aggressively turn back the Turkish tide.

Before examining the particular event of the siege of Szigetvár, the general historical context should be sketched. The mid 17th century was a time of great turmoil and confusion in Hungary and Europe. The attitudes and alliances which had been in place in the time of the siege of Sziget had changed in the intervening eighty years from the fall of Sziget to the composition of the epic. The Zrínyi family, as that of many of their contemporaries, was still committed to the defeat of the Turks and the restoration of the unity and independence of the Hungarian kingdom.[1] The setting of The Siege of Sziget, as of the poet's life, was the Turkish occupation of Hungary. In 1526, the Sultan Suleiman II had advanced on Hungary and defeated its forces at Mohács. King Louis II was killed, thus initiating the next 150 years of divisive warfare. One faction of the nobility, hoping for support from a strong ruler and his European connections, elected Ferdinand of Habsburg who claimed the throne by kinship with Louis; the other, standing by the 1505 resolution to elect only a national monarch, chose János Zápolyai. In 1541, after the fall of Buda, Suleiman made Transylvania a vassal state under Zápolyai's son, János Zsigmond (John Sigismund) also called John I. Central Hungary became a Turkish province (the *hódoltság*) and Royal Hungary under the Habsburgs was restricted to the western and northern fringes of the country. But, while Transylvania was a Turkish vassal state, it did exercise considerable independence under its abler rulers and came to represent to all Hungarians a guarantee of independence against both the Habsburgs and the Turks, but especially against the former. Hungarian history of the period was thus played out against this tripartite division.

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1. Zrínyi mentions the family and ethnic backgrounds of his heroes, but makes no substantial distinctions in their goals and in their dedication to a common ideal symbolized by Hungary. In fact, he makes a point of saying that there was not distinction between Hungarians and Croats who fought together against the Turks. Brief histories of the family can be found in Tibor Klaniczay, Zrínyi Miklós, 2nd rev. ed (Budapest: Akademiai Kiadó, 1964); István Sugár, Szigetvár és viadala (Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1976); Tibor Tüskés, Így élt Zrínyi Miklós (Budapest: Móra Könyvkiadó, 1973); Sándor Sík, Zrínyi Miklós (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1904).

Ferdinand, while nominally free ruler of Royal Hungary, had obliged himself to a huge annual tribute to the Sultan as the price of peace. This tribute, moreover, only brought peace for Vienna and the Austrian provinces: the treaty stipulated that Austria would undertake no major campaigns, or fortify any major strongholds. On the frontier, the fighting went on unabatedly: the Hungarian lands were subjected to constant Turkish raids and tax collections. The fact that dual taxation was guaranteed by treaty in several border areas meant that disputes were inevitable. The Hungarian commanders retaliated, when they thought their interests infringed on, though often chided for this by Vienna, which eventually replaced these commanders with foreigners who did nothing. When the Turks saw an opportunity for war, moreover, the so-called truce was easily broken.

Such an occasion presented itself in 1564 when Maximillian II, who had succeeded Ferdinand on the Hungarian throne, launched a campaign to secure Transylvania. Suleiman chose to defend his vassal, spurred perhaps by the fact that the emperor owed him two years' tribute. Yet, though the Hapsburgs continued to cast a covetous eye on Transylvania, their interest in the Hungarian lands seemed to have waned after 1556 when their election as Holy Roman Emperors seemed assured. The forts were insufficiently provisioned and armed, and when major campaigns were undertaken, the Imperial Court was reluctant to engage the Turks or to press advantages gained by the Hungarian soldiers. In 1568, the Hapsburgs signed an agreement that recognized the tripartite division of the country. They also began a policy of centralization at the expense of Royal Hungary. Notably, the command of the army was never in Hungarian hands after 1556; foreign generals, inexperienced in the Turkish wars and uninterested in the territories where they waged their campaigns, stalled and retreated, devastating the land they were supposed to defend. As long as only Hungarian lands were endangered, no one at the court seemed concerned for the Kingdom of Hungary. The protests of magnates like the Zrínyis went unheeded.[2]

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2. This is a highly simplified account designed to place events of the poem in the context in which it was composed. Naturally, the actors were neither aware of the complexities or did not care to make distinctions. The works below will give more detailed analyses on matters such as the Habsburg claims to Transylvania, the Ottoman's *ferman* over the territory, and the double dependancy which led to an almost constant state of tension and numerous military campaigns. Some of the princes of Transylvania undoubtedly sought only power, but there were others, such as István Bocskai and Gábor Bethlen who certainly saw their rule in Transylvania as a guarantee of political independence and religious and cultural identity for Hungary as a whole. Some historical works are: Miklós Istvánffy, A Magyarok története in Zrínyi Miklós Válogatott munkái, introd. and selections by Erzsébet Székely. (Kolozsvár: Dacia, 1972); László Nagy, A végvári dicsőség nyomában (Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1978); Katalin Péter, A magyar romlásnak századában (Budapest: Gondolat, 1975); István Sugár, Szigetvár és viadala (Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1976); Peter F. Sugar, Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804. A History of East Central Europe, v. 5. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977; Ágnes Várkonyi, Török világ és magyar külpolitika (Budapest: Magvető, 1975) and her Historical Personality, Crisis and Progress in 17th Century Hungary (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1970). Contemporary works are cited below.

In 1566, by the time Suleiman had marshaled his army and moved against Hungary, Vienna had also collected a force of 100,000 men plus cavalry and heavy artillery and musketeers. Yet, in spite of Zrínyi's and Hungarian expectations, Maximillian did nothing. From August 12 through October, he bided his time in camp around Győr. Albini, the secretary of the Italian embassy, noted: "This army is unable to act. ... it serves merely for the defense of the neighboring region," i.e. Austria. In fact, the secret imperial diaries bear this out: "The military position in Transdanubia, whether in war or in peace, is equally desirable for us... The castles of Győr and Komárom are important keys to all of Germany ... these are the last defenses of our city of Vienna" (Sugar 191-195). The rest of Hungary did not interest these kings of the country, as even the contemporaries did not hesitate to point out. The bishop Antal Verancsics wrote at the time of the siege of Szigetvár: "'They? The imperial army did not see a single Turk because they did not dare to go on the Turks ... but instead they went home with great shame and red faces'" (qtd. Sugár 195).

The border fortresses (*végvárak*) standing in the path of the Turks faced them. Palota, under György Thury, repulsed the Turks and earned a place of honor in the epic; Gyula, under László Kerecsényi, capitulated after a brave defense, and also received mention in the epic as an example of futile treachery: in spite of a promise of safe-conduct, the Turks slaughtered the defenders. To the Hungarian king Maximillian, both events seemed equally unimportant. The poet Zrínyi was to judge this inaction and the increasingly suppliant stance of the Hapsburg vis-à-vis the Turks of his own time. The hero of Szigetvár, however, still hoped for the promised royal succor.

The exact date of the elder Miklós Zrínyi's birth is unknown, but since he was fifty-eight at the time of his death, this is generally given as 1508. In 1529 he had taken part in the defense of Vienna, and in 1542 had distinguished himself at Buda. He was made governor (bán) of Croatia in 1542, and later also general of the Transdanubian army. On October 13, 1561 he assumed command of Szigetvár. In many ways, Zrínyi was following the family tradition: the Zrínyis had been fighting the Turks since the previous century. Croatian noblemen of Italian extraction – they had been Counts of Brebiri before receiving the fortress of Zriny from King Louis the Great of Hungary and assuming that name – whose lands lay chiefly in the Balkans, they had clashed with the Turks at a time when the Ottoman empire was only a frontier problem for Hungary.[3] In the generations preceding the poet's, the family had increased its holdings aggressively through conquest, grants, and marriage in Hungary as well as in Croatia. Csáktornya in the Muraköz became their seat, and the hero's marriage to Katalin Frangepán helped establish the family as one of the most important in Hungary and Croatia.

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3. The family name is spelled in various ways in contemporary literature. The assumed name was Zrninsky, the Latin form Serinus while the vulgar Latin was Sdridni and/or Zrini. Hungarian convention spells it Zrínyi. As noted in the text, the hero of Szigetvár was not an examplary man. He had gained his wealth through blood money as well, particularly from the reward for General Katzianer (Caspar Maurer, Ungarische Chronicle, Nürnberg, 1664, 83-84). But, one must judge this in relation to the times when most lords were equally rapacious. My point is that the poet presents his hero as a champion of Christianity and Hungarian/Croatian values against the Turks. He does not dwell on the other aspects of the hero's life. This is in keeping with the heroic tradition, not that of 20th century historical accuracy.

The aggressive accumulation of wealth, not unusual for the times and in the case of the Zrínyis it was used for noble purposes. As governors of báns of Croatia and major landowners in both Croatia and Hungary, they were responsible for the defense of much of the southern part of Hungary as well as of Croatia. They financed the defense and fortification of not only their own castles but also of the royal forts entrusted to them. They often paid the soldiers from their own resources and assumed the cost of repairs and supplies. The King rarely paid for the defense of the Hungarian forts and generally did not fortify them. As governors and commanders, their responsibility extended to large sections of the country and many soldiers, both on horseback and on foot; but the financial resources, which by law should have accompanied the post, were generally lacking.

It is not surprising that while Zrínyi remained loyal to Ferdinand and Maximillian, and seemed confident of succor almost to the end, he would also be critical of his monarch. In a comment on the Diet of 1559, he noted that the Emperor seemed more concerned with restraining the freedom and privileges of the Estates, than with the Turks (Klaniczay 14). He also argued for war with the Turks in 1564, when, according to Istvánffy, he complained that the Turks continue to plunder and take prisoners in spite of the peace, yet complain if a Hungarian lord protects his own against them. Pleas are useless; the time has come "'to regain our freedom and to throw the yoke from our necks'" (qtd. in Sugár 133).

Aware that war with the Turks was only postponed by the emperor's delaying tactics, and that in any case the border fortresses had to face the constant attacks of the Turkish commanders from the other side of the border, Zrínyi brought the strength of Szigetvár up to 2,300 men and collected food, wine, fodder, water, and construction materials in the castle. Yet, he was some 700 men short of the full complement for the fortress and his artillery was almost nonexistent: about 60 cannon of which no more than six were large, and perhaps a dozen muskets (Sugár148-152). Requests for more and better artillery fell on deaf ears, although help was promised. The large army marshaled on the Danube certainly gave him hope. In the meanwhile, he was willing to do whatever was necessary to stop and slow down the advance of the Turks.

The importance of Szigetvár was recognized at least as early as 1556 when it was attacked and successfully defended. It was one of a line of defensive forts along the Hungarian-Turkish frontier, and while important for Croatia, southern Transdanubia, and even Carinthia, there were equally strategic forts elsewhere. The Imperial Court did not seem to have taken any measures to defend the other fortresses either. On the other hand, Szigetvár did not seem to have been the Sultan's original objective either. Yet, it soon became a focal point of the conflict, assuming within years after the event, European importance. Several factors seemed to have contributed to this. After the attack on Siklós, Suleiman committed his entire army to the siege, and he himself encamped there. He died under its walls, and the Turkish advance was stopped. Another peace soon followed, and while the usual hostilities did not cease, the expansion of the Turkish empire was essentially halted. The bravery of the defenders of Sziget undoubtedly also contributed to its luster: all of Europe was taken by reports of the heroic defense. Ballads, chronicles, and histories soon recorded the events. The genesis of The Siege of Sziget reaches back to these times.[4]

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4. Sándor Apponyi, Hungarica: Magyar vontakozású külföldi nyomtatványok (Budapest: s.n. 1900-1902) cites 20 titles. Contemporary and near contemporary works are first, Ferenac Črnko, Posjedanje I

The epic remains close to the historical events, which is not surprising, given the poet Zrínyi's avowed intent to write "true history." He read widely and thoughtfully, judging by his library and the marginal notes in his books. He was familiar with Croatian, Italian, Hungarian and even Turkish accounts. While he cites Miklós Istvánffy, the Hungarian chronicler who recorded the contemporary events, and Johannes Sambucus, the one who memorialized these for the Austrian archives by name, he certainly did not limit his sources to these men. Most importantly, Ferenac Črnko, a page of Zrínyi the soldier, recorded the events in Croatian. Budina translated it as Historia Szigethi ..., and it was this Latin version that the world best knew. All later versions are traced back to Črnko, for example De capto Cigetho (1571) from the Transylvania Saxon historian Schesaeus; the Croatian chronicle of Brno Krnarutič's Vazetye Sigetta grada (1584), which had been dedicated to the hero's son György; and the collection of writings known as the Zrínyi album (1587) which contained excerpts from the histories of Ferenc Forgách and Budina. (Klaniczay, 130-154.)

The siege lasted from August 1, when the vanguard reached Sziget, to September 7, when Zrínyi, with his forces reduced to about 200 men, broke out of the burning fortress. By all accounts, including Zrínyi's own, they could have held out longer if the fire had not forced them to abandon the outer fortress. But, in any case, they held the fort long enough for help to arrive if it would come at all. Closely related to the siege, in fact as well as in the epic, was the attack on Siklós, which gave the defenders a moral advantage. The siege itself comprised several stages: the early days when sallies from the fort could still do damage among the Turks; the fall of the new town on August 9; the destruction of the old town that forced a withdrawal into the fortress on August 17; and the fire on September 5 which engulfed the outer fortress and placed Zrínyi in his last, untenable situation. It was the Turkish artillery that did most damage. In the course of the month they not only improved their positions by being able to advance into the city, but also by draining the marshes that surrounded the fort. At the end, sappers did tunnel through the fortress and the gunpowder reserves were ignited, causing the great fire that could not be extinguished.

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osvojenje Sigetia, by a page of the soldier Zrínyi on whose account most of the other works were based. Samuel Budina translated the Croatian work into Latin as Historia sigethi totius sclavoniae fortissimi propugnaculi a Solymnno turcarum imperatore Anno MDLXVI capti Christianisque erepti per M. Samuelem Budinam Labacensem. Other authors who can be mentioned are: Johannes Samubus Aus dem Tagebuch des kaiserlichen Hofhistoriagraphen, Miklós Istvánffy's A magyarok történetéből, Brno Krnarutič Vazetye Sigetta grada, and Pietro Albino's De Sigetho Hungriae propugnaculo, a Turca anna MDLXVI oabsesso et expugnato oppusculum ... An English account appeared in 1664 which was republished in Hungary as Angol életrajz Zrínyi Miklósról, with an introd.. by Iván Sándor Kovács. Budapest: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1987.

Historians and modern reconstructions bear out the great discrepancy in numbers between the attackers and the besieged that Zrínyi claims. While the numbers differ, the odds were about the one to one hundred and fifty given in the epic. Nevertheless, Zrínyi's leadership helped even the odds, and his dedication seemed to have inspired the soldiers. Most of the accounts mention Zrínyi's speech to his men before the final attack. The morale of the Turkish camp was known to be low in spite of the numerical superiority; many in the horde, moreover, could not be depended on (Istvánffy, Črnko, Budina, Sugár, and others).

The poet Zrínyi worked historical facts and the elaboration of chronicles and heroic poems into an epic that presented an ideal hero (*vitéz*) to his contemporaries. He is not merely praising an ancestor – in fact, he apologizes at times for the seeming immodesty in praising a relative. For this strategy to be successful, the hero's character had to be idealized and his actions had to receive suitable motivation. But even in this idealization, contemporaries and history support the poet: Zrínyi's excesses were those of his age, and even these were forgiven because of his heroism. The hero Zrínyi's own statements and letters also justify the view of him as a martyr for his faith and country. In a letter to Dorottya Kanizsai, widow of Tamás Nádasdy, he wrote from the besieged castle that it was his decision "to shut [himself] into Sziget, not for his own good, but for the more effective preservation of Christianity; first of all, for the good God, [then] for the imperial and royal highness, as well as wishing to serve Christianity and his own dear country facing final destruction, faithfully, immovably, with a serene face, with the spilling of his blood, and – if fate brings it – the loss of his head "(qtd. in Klanaiczay 75).

In the formation of his ideal Christian and Hungarian hero, the poet Zrínyi's own character and education also played an important part. Orphaned at an early age, he was raised by Eva Poppel, the wife of Ferenc Batthyány and a great Protestant patroness. As ward of the king and a Catholic, however, he was educated in Graz, Vienna, and under the care of his other guardian, Cardinal Péter Pázmány. He concluded his formal studies with a tour of Italy, and at about seventeen years of age took control of his own affairs. From this time on his life was devoted to the public service demanded of his station: defense of his lands and of his country against the Turks and active participation in government and politics in which he saw a chance to shape a better future for his country. Called to the campaigns of the Thirty Years War, he participated at first but later begged out for the more pressing duties at home. And, while he had been impatient with his early formal schooling, he continued to read and learn. He studied history, military science and politics, but was also interested in literature, architecture, and gardening. His house at Csáktornya reflected the character of the great Renaissance houses. His estates were carefully managed, and as he engaged in trade, particularly with Venice, he was interested in economics. He was a more religious, more philosophical, and a more just man than his great-grandfather had been, in spite of the latter's greatness as a soldier against the Turks. All of this naturally colors the picture of the Zrínyi of Szigetvár, as does the purpose of the epic. The traditions of the genre also require a certain type of hero. In all of this the poet had to shape his material accordingly.

For the requirements of the epic, an idealized Christian hero was needed. In this, as in the treatment of history, Zrínyi solved the dilemma between historical fact and artistic validity by remaining close to history and elaborating only in terms of the spirit of the age and of the universal values he is espousing: loyalty, *pietas* that is, devotion and duty to God, the state and one's family. In these respects, Miklós Zrínyi, who was far from saintly as an actual historical figure, is successfully transformed into a Christian hero who dies a martyr's death in defense of his faith and his country. His reward is not merely heaven (although God dispatches Gabriel to lead the souls of the warriors to Him), but also the promise of ultimate triumph: in the third and fourth generation, Turkish power will be broken (O.Sz 12-24).

The historical events of Szigetvár, retold in the epic, must be examined with the above considerations in mind. The action is carefully prepared. It opens with a heavenly scene in which God declares that he is punishing the Hungarians for their sins. He will send the Turks on them, and force them to repent. Suleiman is thus prompted in his determination by divine deception. Once God's purpose is served, however, the instrument of his vengeance will also be destroyed. In council, when Suleiman announces his decision, he refers not only to the dream he had, but also to the letter from Arslan, the pasha of Buda. He cites division among the Hungarians as a sign of their weakness, confirming the vision by the reports. Arslan, he declares, has advised that the empire is torn by religious strife, and Maximilian "has a care only for eating and drinking" (O. Sz. I.64). The muster of the Turkish troops, lead by Deliman the Crimean khan and the strong Saracen Demirham comes to one hundred-forty-seven thousand. The Sultan's confidence certainly seems well founded. The second canto further delineates the two sides: the Sultan faces brave captains in Hungary such as György Thury who defends Palota successfully, but also those who will capitulate like László Kerecsényi at Gyula. The two adversaries are also contrasted: Suleiman is described setting out at the head of his army amid great pomp and wealth: he and his marvelous horse are both decked out in gold and jewels. He is a proud and vain man, yet also brave and wise, not foolishly swayed by fortune – but so cruel that even his own nation hates him.

Zrínyi is also introduced before the poet makes it clear that Suleiman will chose to go against Sziget, not Eger. He is described as a man well-known and feared by the Turks, and one to whom God has given victory because he had been a true servant. Then, in a long prayer, Zrínyi shows himself as humble and pious; he thanks God for the blessings he had received and begs for forgiveness of his transgressions and mercy on his country. As a sign of special grace, Christ's figure on the crucifix answers his prayer: he will die a martyr's death against the Turks, but Suleiman will die before he does. His son and his descendants, moreover, will make his fame eternal.

The cosmic nature of the struggle between Zrínyi and Suleiman is thus established, while the historical events are fully incorporated. The poet's ability to mesh the various levels of the epic is one of his greatest strengths. The historical tale of a continuous and newly-renewed war is reinforced by the religious one of the clash of Satan and God, Islam and Christianity, Hungarian and Turk. On the artistic level, the characters are outlined in terms of their symbolism, yet they retain individual traits. They are not all good or wholly evil, and even among the Turks there are admirable heroes; while the Hungarians, too, have foolish leaders and squabbling lords, though not at Sziget.

In the third canto, Sziget seals its fate by calling on itself the forces of Suleiman. Although history also records a hesitation by the Sultan between two possible goals, Eger and Szigetvár, no clear reason for the decision to go against Sziget has been advanced, other than Zrínyi's presence and the Siklós raid. The poet, on the other hand, makes this motivation very precise, not depending on the celestial framework to carry the action. Zrínyi deals Suleimam a blow at Siklós that the Sultan must revenge: not only is a favorite of his killed, but Zrínyi also takes rich prizes. The careful way in which the poet connects the threads of his narrative is also shown here. The unlucky Mehmet Gujlirgi is at Siklós because he is being sent to take command of Bosnia. The former ruler of this province had been promoted to pasha of Buda upon Arslan's loss of favor. Arslan had been defeated by Thury, and the Sultan resented the Christian victory. On another literal and historical level, the incident also shows the superior skill and bravery of the Hungarians who know they must win by brains and not brute strength. In future encounters, this will be increasingly important: though outnumbered, the Hungarians are victorious for many days. Though seemingly defeated in the end since the defenders die in the final sally, the ultimate victory is theirs because the Turks retreat. They do not press the advantage and so are effectively stopped in their European campaign as Sziget. In addition, within the epic framework, the hosts of angels which conduct the souls of the Christian heroes to heaven also signal the real victory of the defenders. These devices are successful for even in the final battle the forces seem evenly matched: Turkish victory at this point is much more attributable to fate or God's will than to their superior numbers or prowess.

The early Siklós episode is important in introducing Zrínyi and his soldiers. The commander's bravery and wisdom, shown in this episode, is paired with his concern for his men shown upon the return to Szigetvár. Then, while the Hungarians are resting, feasting and singing of brave deeds, the Turkish camp is shown: angry and so disorganized that two stampeded horses throw the camp into such panic that 3,000 men are slain in the blind fighting (Pars quarta). News of the Sultan's determination to move against Sziget reaches Zrínyi, and he prepares his people for the siege. Encouraging the men by references to earlier great victories, as well as by pointing out the foolishness of believing in the Turk, Zrínyi takes an oath to defend his fort to the death:

We, moreover, must fight not for any trivial reason
But for our beloved Christian homeland,
For our Lord, for our wives, for our children
For our honor and our lives...

I will be with you while I have my head,
I swear to the living god of hosts, I desire that you do likewise,
With drawn swords in your hands, swear.

Harcolunk pediglen nem akármi okért
Kell, hanem keresztény szerelmes hanzánkért,
Urunkért, feleségünkért, gyermekeinkért,
Magunk tisztességéségért, és életünkért ...

Feiem fen áltáig lészek én veletek,
Esküszem seregek élő Istenének,
Kivánom hogy ti is igy chelekedgyetek,
Éles szablyát kézben tartván esküdjetek.
(V, 27; 35)

His words here echo the letter he had written to the wife of Tamás Nádasdy before the siege in which he declared his determination to hold the fort.

The meeting of father and son which follows this martial scene is a tender one: Zrínyi urges his son to be brave, loyal and virtuous, worthy of his name. The youth asks to remain in the fort, but Zrínyi emphasizes that all of his men must do their duty. The son must leave as there would be no profit in his death while the message he carries is of importance.

In the sixth canto, the two great armies finally clash. There is, of course, the usual embassy from the Sultan urging surrender. At this opportunity the clever Halul *beg* points out that the Germans can hardly be trusted to send help, for they desire nothing so much as the death of the Hungarians. It would be wiser to surrender, he urges, since even if help were to come it would be too late: on a crab's back. He skillfully sketches the attitude of the Austrian court which will let the Hungarians fight alone as long as the hereditary provinces or other parts of the Empire are not threatened. Zrínyi, however, is determined in his course and rejects the opportunity to give up the fort without a fight and thus open the way for the Turkish forces to take Vienna and the Austrian provinces. In response, the Turks launch the first of many attacks on the very next day. At first, Zrínyi seems to have the upper hand. The defenders win the skirmishes while morale in the Turkish camp declines. Each sally by the Hungarian defenders results in tenfold slaughter of the Turks; only the constant artillery barrage of Ali Portug seems to touch the Christians. The Christian sortie by the Almás River under Deli Víd kills 3,000 horsemen and 500 janissary and importantly, also one of the Turkish heroes, Hamvivan (Pars sexta). In the next battle, Demirham seeks Deli Víd to avenge Hamvivan's death, and the duel is eventually set up and played out with adventures. By the eighth canto it is recounted that the Turks are discouraged, and a council is called. Unable to decide on a course of action, they allow the *vezir* Mohammed Sokolli Pasha to concentrate on bombardment rather than assaults. The Sultan remains absent from this council, not wishing to reveal that he is ill of the plague. Lack of discipline and desire for individual glory by some disrupt the unity of the camp. Deliman, the Tartar khan, withdraws in anger, thus establishing the preliminaries required by the epic convention and needed for verisimilitude. But these events are woven out of history. Great heroes are identified on either side, and, just as in Agamemnon's camp, dissent and discouragement reign. With Hamvivan dead and Deliman withdrawn out of anger, the chances of the Turks look slim indeed.

In the ninth part of the narrative, the necessary turn of events comes, and the great epic battles are prepared. The bombardment proves to be a successful strategy (as both Budina and Istvánffy had noted) and Zrínyi sends out two of his men with a message for the Emperor, dallying on the outskirts of Vienna. Again, echoing tradition, the incident is reminiscent of the mission of Diomedes and Ulysses as is the friendship of Lőrinc Juranics and Radivoy the

Croatian volunteer. These two men do as much damage as they can in the sleeping Turkish camp. Sent by Zrínyi to reconnoiter the Turkish camp and to wreak havoc as much as possible, they are to distract attention from the fortress. The two heroes do as much damage as they can but are not able to return. They are almost through the lines when sentries notice them: while Radivoy could escape, he turns to help his companion, and both die heroic deaths. The poet emphasizes, however, that the men were brave, not foolhardy.

In recounting the adventure of the two heros Zrínyi again uses epic devices while attempting to stay true to history. A midnight spying expedition and the loyalty of friends are both well established in Homer and Virgil. But these cantos also emphasize the qualities Zrínyi had given each side from the first: loyalty and respect for the commander on the Christian side; laxness, drunkenness, selfishness on the Turkish one. Further, it is through actions that the terrific might of the Turks can be balanced. And again, the poet is historically accurate, for in the long years of Turkish warfare it was precisely this contrast of fighters and fighting methods that allowed the *végvárak* to survive. Following the relative calm of the night-time raid, the intensity of the fighting is renewed at the very gate of the fortress. Forced to abandon the city which had been reduced to rubble and burning houses, the defenders make a stand by the gate. Peter Bót is remembered in the chronicles for his bravery in defending the destroyed tower. The poet has Demirham, the giant Saracen hero, break through the heavy doors, but even he must retreat before the wrath of Zrínyi. The concluding lines are one of the key statements placing Zrínyi at the center of the epic:

To the whole army he gave courage,
He gives strength to Sziget's men, and power
Because no one at his side ever suffered harm:
All desire to fight beside him with courage.

After great, long battle he returns to his fair castle,
Like to the faithful lioness returning to its cubs,
Driving off its enemies, she returns to her liar,
Thus does Zrínyi return to his retainers with joy.

And they, like lion cubs, rejoice around him
Are glad and adulate him;
They praise the God who destroys armies;
Are careful, industrious, and keep watch.

Az egész seregnek ő ad bátorságot,
Ő ád erőt Szigethnek s' hatalmat,
Mert soha mellette senki kárt nem vallot
Minden szüvel kiván mellette az hartzot.

Nagy haszu hartz után meg tér szép várában
Mint az kőlykeihez hű nőstény oroszlán,
El űzvén ártoit meg tér barlangjában:
Igy tér meg szolgáihoz Zrinyi vigságában.

Ök penig kőrüle mint oroszlány kölkök,
Vigadnak, örülnek, s' neki hizelködnek,
Seregek meg bonto Istenét dichérnek,
Vigyáznak, fáradnak, és gondot viselnek.
(O.Sz. X.104-106)

To increase the importance of the final scenes and also to enrich the tapestry of the epic, Zrínyi provides a relief from the general melees in the next three parts, Cantos 11 through 13. Deliman, the great hero of the previous part, is forced to flee because he had killed the Sultan's son-in-law. The duel between Demirham and Deli Víd is begun but, fearing the loss of their champion, the Turks break the truce and interrupt the duel. While there is a brief battle as Zrínyi seeks his friend and champion, the Hungarians are soon forced to withdraw into the fort. Deliman, meanwhile, makes his way to Cumilla, and the 12th canto is devoted to the idyll of their love, though the great battles are never far off. Cumilla, the fourth daughter of the Sultan, is loved by Deliman but married to Rustan. Deliman had withdrawn from the fight to join the Sultan's daughter, but he is now called back to support the Turkish cause which seems lost in the face of the determined opposition of Zrínyi. For, without their leader Deliman, many of the troops threaten to leave Sziget which has proven much too hard to take already. Finally, Deli Víd's adventures are concluded in another nod to the epic tradition, though more in the tradition of Tasso than Homer.

While serving to embellish the poem, the incidents in the previous canto are not purely decorative. The two Turks whose adventures become the focus are the bravest and best of the Sultan's heroes, yet they endanger the whole enterprise by their pride and foolhardiness. Like Achilles' anger in the Homeric epic, Deliman's brings near ruin to his side. Demirham's insistence on a duel also threatens the Turks who cannot afford to lose such a champion. On the Christian side, Deli Víd uses skill and cunning to escape certain death because he has a duty to Zrínyi and the fortress. Trapped in the Turkish camp, he does not expect any help. However, in another of the touching episodes that add so much color and life to the epic, his wife, a converted Turkish lady, comes to his rescue. Being a woman, she had not been bound by the oath of absolute obedience to Zrínyi and so, donning a Turkish warrior's clothes, she makes her way to the camp. This romantic rescue is again more reminiscent of Tasso than Homer showing the way in which Zrínyi used both traditions to shape his own epic. The two escape, and even manage to kill a good number of the enemy in the process: Deli Víd must, after all, die only in the final battle. Such adventures, attributed to various heroes, are recorded in song and chronicle (Klaniczay 152-153). Again, Zrínyi molds his material from the stuff of history and the framework of the epic to present a scene that humanizes the fighters while giving a sense of the real closeness that developed between the forces in times of truce.

The situation in the Turkish camp is shown to be so desperate by this time that the council is ready to order a retreat, leaving, at most, a small guard behind. Here, fate intervenes: Zrínyi's last message to the Emperor, sent by carrier pigeon, is intercepted. From this, the Turks learn that there are barely 500 Hungarians (including women and wounded), in the fort; they have been forced to retreat to an inner keep, but must break out or die in the flames. Having repulsed ten attacks, and with no hope of help, they chose to die in battle. This pivotal event, while not paralleled in history, is nevertheless justified. Zrínyi had sent messages to the Emperor for help; none arrived. The Sultan, or Mehmet Sokolovics, might not have known how desperate Zrínyi's situation was, but the historical Zrínyi had made a resolution to break out of the fort in a last desperate sally. As for the Turkish readiness to withdraw, the death of the Sultan certainly made this a consideration. In fact, historians cite this as the spur to a final last effort: if the fortress were not taken in a day or two, the siege would have to be abandoned. Poetic truth and historical veracity agree.

The forces are joined in a final epic battle. In the epic tradition, the conflict assumes superhuman proportions. The magician Alderlan summons the forces of darkness against the Christians, and they storm the fortress with fire and brimstone, echoing Suleiman's command to bring fire and steel against the castle:

The Christian heroes run to the ramparts,
But cannot stand the force of the fire;
The flames of god Vulcan shoot high
Allowing no one to come to the ramparts.

For the Turks with many fiery balls,
Run with the Furies and their horrible torches,
They've taken the outer fortress by storm,
The *bán* with his five hundred bides in the inner castle.

There is no staying there either,
For the fire flashes above their heads densely,
By many thousand souls Zrínyi is beset,
But, like a stone, is not frightened at all.

Futnak a bástyákra Keresztény vitézek,
De nem álhattyák meg erejét az tűznek;
Járnak az lángjai Vulcanus Istennek,
Senkit az bástyákhoz közel nem eresztnek.

Mert az Törökök is sok tűzes labdákkal,
Egyaránt futkosnak szörnyű Furiákkal,
Az külső várat már meg vették ostrommal,
Bán belső várban szorult öt száz magával;

De ottan sem lehet maradás sokáig,
Mert tűz fejek főlőt már sűrűn villámlik
Sok ezer lélektűl Zrini késértetik,
Ő penig mint egy kű semmit nem rettenik;
(XIV. 73-75)

It is against this background that Deli Víd and Demirham face each other for the final time. Both heroes die in the fight in which supernatural creatures seem to intervene. But, in the end, having played their role in God's plan the forces of the underworld are driven back by Gabriel and the mortals again have the field to themselves.

The introduction of supernatural forces in the final canto functions on a symbolic rather than literal level in the poem. Zrínyi himself notes that the heavenly scene is not a real event in worldly terms but the will of God. The fierce fire, the raging battle, the efforts of both defenders and attackers is the final wild and desperate rally of both sides. While reminiscent of the battle of the gods in the Iliad, the similarities are evocative, not parallel. Furthermore, they are presented in terms of the actual events: it was the fierce fire which cut off Zrínyi from his supplies and made his situation untenable (Sugár 174-175).

With the coming of day, Zrínyi's resolution to make a last sally from the fort and confront the Turkish army, is put into practice, and he becomes much more the center of the poem than at anytime up to this point. He had dominated all the action by his name and fame up to this point. Here everything focuses on him. Following historical accounts, the poet has the hero address his men and urge them to fight bravely in their last encounter. Showing his lack of concern for worldly goods, and possibly defiance for the Turks, Zrínyi sets fire to his treasures, dons his most magnificent clothes, places gold in his pockets for his slayer as a proof of his identity and an gesture of defiance to the Turks, and turns to his soldiers:

Since, because of the fire, we cannot stay here,
As soon as God allows us to see the dawning,
We will go out of the castle, and will there show
That those whom we were in life, we are the same now.

Mivel az tűz miát itt nem maradhatunk,
Mihent Isten engedi az hajnalt látnunk,
Ki-mennyünk az várbul, és ot meg-mutatssuk,
Kik voltunk éltünkben mostis az vagyunk.
(XV.8)

The path cut by the soldiers in the Turkish forces ensures them a final moment of glory. Even Deliman flees at first, but finally faces Zrínyi and is killed by him. At this point, the Turks are almost routed, for all flee and Zrínyi is able to cut himself through to the Sultan. The two antagonists clash in an uneven fight, and Zrínyi kills the Sultan. He himself is finally killed by gunshots.

The poem here follows history closely enough, with the natural allowance for the differences in genre. The poet departs from history for greater poetic and symbolic effect in having Zrínyi kill Suleiman, for he does not merely report history, he also interprets it. The final lines of the poem express his purpose:

God of heroes! Behold your servant,
Who did not regret his earthly decay for your sake;
With his blood he wrote in large letters,
Thus subscribing, he gave himself to you,
For his heroic blood, accept his son in your grace.

Vitézek Istene, ime az te szolgád
Nem szánta éretted világi romlását,
Vére hullásával nagy bőtüket formált,
Illy subsribákással néked atta magat,
E vitéz veréert ved kedvedben fiát.
(XV. 109).

It is Zrínyi's interpretation of history, coupled with his artistic skill and concern for the dignity of the epic that raises this poem so significantly above the prose and verse histories and chronicles of the Turkish wars. Karnarutics' work remains a verse chronicle: it recounts the events with poetic skill and concern for the unity of the narrative, but lacks the higher purpose and unifying goal that infuses the epic. The poet Zrínyi's goal and purpose in life was a total dedication to his country. For him, the greatest danger to the nation lay in the Turkish occupation; not because it was in itself so menacing, for by the 17th century Ottoman power was on the wane, but for what it did to the national fabric. He saw the devastation of lands and the decimation of the population through war and pillage, with the survivors being carried off into slavery. This, he knew, cut into the very foundation of a strong nation. He also saw in the continued presence of the Turks the root of the division between Hungarians themselves: those who favored the Transylvanian princes as a guarantee of national autonomy, and those who supported the Hapsburg as more able to deal with the Turkish threat. He soon came to see, perhaps more clearly than his contemporaries, that neither side was right: the Habsburgs would not, and the Transylvanians could not deal with the Turks. Meanwhile, this wedge divided the land, and led to large-scale destruction as armies crossed its territories on the slightest of excuses. What was needed was a strong leader to unite the land as Zrínyi had united his men and the population of Sziget and its environs. Zrínyi, the soldier, also becomes the careful leader, the wise commander, the just lord. Later, Zrínyi the poet came to believe that the only person who could assume the needed leadership would be a strong national monarch.

The idea of a national monarch emerged slowly over Zrínyi's lifetime. At the time of the writing of the epic, he seems to have been thinking of a general model and inspiration only for the Hungarian nation. Repeated disappointments and an ever clearer insight into Habsburg policies, however, gradually forced him to the realization that a man elected from among the Hungarians would be the only one truly concerned with the country. In his letters, this idea was cautiously mentioned; his biographical work on King Matthias presented a mode and precedent,

and in Az török áfium ellen való orvosság ("Medicine Against the Turkish Opium") he clearly urged reliance on the nation's own resources in a strong state. Yet, the genesis of many of these ideas developed later can be found in A szigeti veszedelem and its idealized hero. Zrínyi knew that a monarch would have to be chosen with care. Having seen the disastrous results of personal ambition, he sought someone who would submerge his own ego in the national goals. Dedication to duty, devotion to the nation, bravery and ability to lead are all qualities he extols in the ideal he creates in the hero of the epic. Personal glory is to be sought only through the fulfillment of one's duty. The poet's own words in the "Peroratio" he placed at the conclusion of the published volume best express this thought:

> But I seek my fame not only with my pen,
> But also with my frightful dueling sword:
> While I live, I'll fight the Osman horde
> Let me be covered joyfully by my country's ashes.
>
> De hiremet nem chak keresem pennammal,
> Hanem rettenetes bai-vivo szablyammal;
> Mig élek hartzolok az Ottoman haddal,
> Vigan burittatom hazám hamvaival.
> ("Peroratio" I. 396).

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