

# The Strategic Importance of Zrínyi-Újvár

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Today, the easiest way to visit the ruins of Zrínyi-Újvár is to approach them from Belezna. On the roadway leading to the Belezna train station, one needs to go as long as the bridge of the Principális-csatorna [Main Channel] (hereinafter: Principális Canal). Then, taking a footpath and crossing over the Visszafolyó-patak [Backflow Stream] (hereinafter: Visszafolyó Stream), one can get to the hill of the fortress. Next to the roadway, one can see the ruins of the former Kakonya Inn. Beyond the railway line, the foundations of the former customs house are hidden beneath the bushes. The reason why the well passable footpath came into being is that the Kakonya Ford used to be found there, and one could get to Alsó-Doboru through that crossing place. It was the shortest way between Kanizsa and Csáktornya (today Čakovec, Croatia).



Figure 1.

*Bridge over the Visszafolyó Stream leading to the hill of the fortress*

*Source: picture made by the author*



Figure 2.

*A map sheet of the First Military Survey showing today's area of the fortress*

*Source: Map Collection of the Ministry of Defence, Institute and Museum of Military History, Budapest. Map sheet IV.17*



Figure 3.

*A map sheet of the Second Military Survey showing today's area of the fortress*

*Source: Map Collection of the Ministry of Defence, Institute and Museum of Military History, Budapest. Map sheet XXIII. 61*

The history of the ford can be traced back to the late 1700s on contemporary maps. A map sheet of the First Military Survey<sup>1</sup> still shows the Mura River flowing in the current bed of the Principális Canal. According to a map sheet of the Second Military Survey,<sup>2</sup> the railway had been built by the mid-nineteenth century, and the riverbed of the Mura got beyond the railway line. This condition has not changed since then. In this period, the crossing on the Mura was placed in the extension of the line formed by the Kakonya Inn, the bridge of the Principális Canal and the Belezna railway station.

In the period preceding the First Military Survey, map sketches representing the 1664 siege of the fortress (Montecuccoli, Pál Esterházy, Holst) show the location of the crossing place. This was significantly different from the later conditions. The pontoon bridge could be approached on a road leading to the western side of Szent Mihály Hill, between the steep slope and the Mura, approximately along today's railway line. One may raise the question whether the relocation of the ford was related to the destruction of the fortress. Probably yes, but it would be difficult to find a convincing reason why the place of the crossing had to be changed because of the destruction of the stronghold.

The area lying to the north of the fortress is called Kakonya on contemporary maps. This was the name of a village destroyed in the Ottoman period, which was located on the north side of the present hazardous waste dump site, in the vicinity of the Kanizsa Stream. There was certainly a reason why this place was chosen as the site of the village. The road running along the Kanizsa Stream reached the Mura there, just like the other road in the south, running along the Visszafolyó Stream. There must have been a crossing where the two roads met. A map from 1581<sup>3</sup> shows a settlement called 'Agonatz' at the confluence of the Kanizsa Stream, on the left bank of the Mura. On the opposite bank of the river, there was a fortification called 'Trokgon'. It is not plausible that the name 'Agonatz' can be identified with 'Kakonya', because the location rather corresponds to the village Szentháromság. On the other hand, it is certain that 'Trokgon' on the right bank of the Mura cannot be Kakonya, but some other establishment.

Two structures can be seen on the opposite bank of the Mura on map sketches representing the 1664 siege. One is the building of the powder magazine built of stone or brick, and the other is a rectangular stronghold, a *redoute*, that could accommodate fifty guards. Both buildings disappeared without trace owing to the change of course of the Mura. It is unknown when they were built, but, based on the map, we can assume that one of the two had already been erected by the 1580s. On the basis of its location, I assume that it was the *redoute*. Taking into account the position of the 1664 pontoon bridge, the defensive function of the *redoute* is questionable. In that situation, it would not have been able to exert a direct impact on traffic over the crossing. This placement would have been advantageous if the crossing had had its later course. A map from the first half of the nineteenth century<sup>4</sup> shows the road leading at the foot of the *redoute* partly washed away by the Mura.

<sup>1</sup> The First Military Survey completed during the reign of Emperor Joseph II. Map Collection of the Ministry of Defence, Institute and Museum of Military History, Budapest. Map sheet IV.17.

<sup>2</sup> Second Military Survey. Ibid. Map sheet XXIII. 61.

<sup>3</sup> The map entitled "Map of Stockholm 1581" was provided to me by Lieutenant Colonel József Kelenik, for which I would like to thank him here again. See *Kisari Balla* 1996.

<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank György Domokos for providing me with a digital copy of the map kept in the Kriegsarchiv in Vienna. Reference: ÖStA KA k7k 209.







be best approached in the area lying between the confluences of the two streams. This place offered the best conditions for crossing.

In contrast, the Zrínyivár Ford almost completely lacked any favourable feature for crossing. Travellers arriving from Kanizsa first had to cross the dam of the mill lake constructed by holding back the water of Visszafolyó Stream. Next, they had to climb up the eastern side of the Szent Mihály Hill, cross the plateau, and then descend on the western side of the hill. Finally, they arrived at the pontoon bridge taking the road that ran through the narrow pass formed between the steep hillside and the Mura. One can rightfully ask what motivated the translocation.

We need to consider the function and defence system of the fortress when looking for an answer to this question. Trokogna depicted on the 1581 map served the defence of the crossing place on the right bank. In 1661, there were nine outposts<sup>5</sup> on the border of the Zrínyi estate, along the Mura, from Légrád to Kotoriba, which were erected a little further away from the riverbank. Trokogna was probably one of these outposts, but it was built right on the bank, as it guarded the river crossing place.

In the spring of 1661, a considerable Ottoman army appeared at Kakonya, on Szent Mihály Hill. Zrínyi realised the danger, and described it in his letter addressed to the Imperial War Council as follows: "In military terms, however, I can say that this place is the shield or bastion of the whole Muraköz, and even of the entire border region of Slavonia, from here to the south beyond the Drava. The one who holds this hill, has control over the Muraköz and the two rivers, the Mura and Drava, too. And if the Ottomans would have seized this hill (as they wanted to), neither Kapronca, nor any other fortress could have withheld them from the invasion of Slavonia. The truth is that, over the last sixty years, no one has observed this place, but the current pasha, who, accompanied by two thousand men, came here last May. He personally inspected everything with the greatest attention, and would have occupied it, if I had not prevented him from doing that in time."<sup>6</sup>

It was imperative for Zrínyi to occupy the height and fortify it, ahead of the Ottomans. During this, his primary objective was to secure the crossing place. The fortification, which was later called a bridgehead, was not originally built with that function but as an outpost securing the crossing place, where a small number of guards could effectively control traffic. To this end, natural and man-made features were used to create conditions that would slow down and limit movement. Barricades and obstructions could have also been placed on the road leading to the Kakonya Ford, but it led in a well passable stretch of the terrain, and after the removal of these obstacles, the enemy could have continued their way unimpeded. Zrínyi chose a different solution. He did not build obstructions on the road but modified the course of the road itself in a way that the natural features of the terrain would provide impediment.

<sup>5</sup> Miklós Zrínyi to the Imperial War Council. Légrád, 5 July 1661. See page 272 of the present volume.

<sup>6</sup> Miklós Zrínyi to the Imperial War Council. Légrád, 5 July 1661. See page 271 of the present volume.



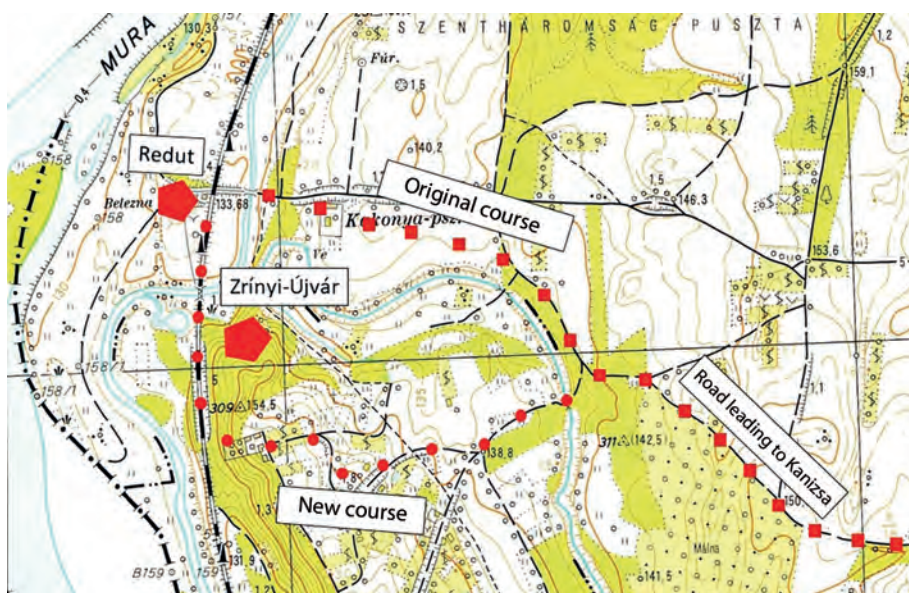


Figure 7.

*The original course of the Kakonya Ford and the one modified by Zrínyi as projected on a modern map sheet*

Source: drawn by the author

He terminated the former course of the ford on the eastern side of the Visszafolyó Stream. Moreover, he transformed the stream into a fishpond, which probably flooded the road and swamped its surroundings. Afterwards, he directed the road over a dam to the western side of the swamp. He led the road up to Szent Mihály Hill and brought it down on the western side of the hill, because he installed the flying bridge at the foot of the hill, where the railway line passes over the Principális Canal today. This, in the light of the contemporary traffic conditions, was completely irrational, as travellers generally sought to avoid climbing hills in order to reduce the effort required from draught animals. If it was possible to avoid ascents, they did so. They did not mark out a route where they had to climb a hill just to descend it on the other side. Here, however, this was done on purpose in order to slow down travellers arriving at the crossing place and control their movement. Those who came from the direction of Kanizsa first met the guards of the mill dam. Next, they climbed the hill and reached the bulwarks of the fortress, where they continued their way within the range of firearms. Then, they descended from the hill and entered between the steep slope and the Mura and passed through a kind of channel towards the bridge. The road was closed by a palisade there, and guards oversaw traffic movements again. Everyone had to pass through three checkpoints to the pontoon bridge. This system made the ford almost inaccessible. If the enemy still managed to get there, the flying bridge could finally be disconnected, and the guards of the *redoute* on the other side of the river could prevent the crossing.

This system made the crossing easy to control, but it was not designed at once. In 1661, the argumentation in support of the need to build the fortress mentions – though only in

the fifth place – its use as a base for the army operating in the southern part of Transdanubia: “5. If there was a war with the Ottomans, there would be no other secure place in the whole borderland to accommodate an army than this fortress, from where Kanizsa, Berzence, Segesd and Szigetvár could be attacked from safety.”<sup>7</sup>

At that time, the emphasis was still laid on the occupation of the height dominating over the region. If the objective had been to build a bridgehead making possible the crossing and garrisoning of a significant number of soldiers, then, the existing Kakony Ford should have been strengthened. The right wing of the bridgehead would have been formed by the fortified elevation, and, connected to it, the area between the Visszafolyó and Kanizsa Streams could have been closed up with a rampart. They would have perhaps directed the Visszafolyó Stream along the rampart, and thus, linked it to the Kanizsa Stream. The fact that it is not a mere fantasy is demonstrated by a representation of the fortress, where it appears as a regularly fortified bridgehead. In 1664, Montecuccoli missed exactly these defences: “It was therefore a worthless place: with no moat, no contrascarpa, no forma, no wings, and no earth inside. It was completely open towards the water: and it was indeed very likely to fall at any hour of the attack.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1661, there was still a possibility for regular construction, but, in reality, the ford had to be controlled and defended continually with a small number of guards. Zrínyi was aware of this important factor, and, in his letter of 1661, he mentioned it in the third place among the reasons for building the fortress: “There are nine outposts between Légrád and Kotoriba, which I have to maintain partly at my own expense and partly from royal pay. However, the money arrives so late and it is so little as if nothing came. So I cannot defend this line at my own expense any longer. The hill saves a lot of money for me because it substitutes six outposts, and although more soldiers will be needed here than at those six outposts, the soldiers are easier to support here because they are provided with vines, arable land and everything else they need.”<sup>9</sup> This aspect is likely to have been increasingly emphasised during the construction of the fortifications defending the ford, and Montecuccoli’s note also suggests that it was entirely successful: “This stronghold was not built on the model of fortifications (neither its geographical location, nor the structure itself, nor the area allowed that), but to defend – together with a redoute – the bridgehead that ensured the passage over the Mura towards Kanizsa, and to cover the troops that went on raids in peacetime.”<sup>10</sup>

The skilled warlord and military scientist described very accurately what the fortress was suitable for in 1664. However, after the successful winter campaign in 1664, the military operations did not continue according to Zrínyi’s expectations. The capture of Kanizsa was attempted later than originally planned, and they did not launch a surprise attack but a systematic siege, out of necessity. After giving up the siege, the army retreated to Zrínyi-Újvár, but ignoring Zrínyi’s proposition, they set up their camp on the opposite side of the Mura, which they believed safe enough from the Ottoman Turks. By doing so, they

<sup>7</sup> Miklós Zrínyi to the Imperial War Council. Légrád, 5 July 1661. See page 272 of the present volume.

<sup>8</sup> Raimondo Montecuccoli: *Relazione della campagna dell’ Armata Cesarea nell’ Anno MDCLXIV*. See page 295 of the present volume.

<sup>9</sup> Miklós Zrínyi to the Imperial War Council. Légrád, 5 July 1661. See page 272 of the present volume.

<sup>10</sup> Raimondo Montecuccoli: *Relazione della campagna dell’ Armata Cesarea nell’ Anno MDCLXIV*. See page 295 of the present volume.



deprived themselves of the possibility to initiate, for they would have needed a bridgehead that made possible rapid crossing, rallying on the other side of the river, and unimpeded sortie at a point of their choice. The structure established by Zrínyi, which served the control and slowing down of movements in the defence system of the crossing place, also limited the speed of getting to the other side of the Mura from Muraköz. It can be concluded without exaggeration that during the siege of 1664, the area around the fortress became the least suitable place for crossing. Nevertheless, mention must be made of one factor that is certainly in favour of Zrínyi. At the time of the siege, the ford could not enable the Christian army to cross the Mura, but the principal reason for this was that they let the Ottomans occupy the plateau of Szent Mihály Hill. In this way, they lost the waterlogged valley of the Visszafolyó Stream, which offered the natural protection of the eastern side. The Ottomans could seize the edge of the height overlooking the Mura, and with their artillery stationed there, they were able to fire upon the Christian forces on the opposite bank. With this, Zrínyi's nightmare of 1661 came true. Not only did the Ottomans penetrate into the defence system of the fortress, but they also managed to control the far side of the river from the hill.

Zrínyi was aware of the possibilities offered by the defence system of the fortress. It could not meet the needs of crossing, but the plateau of the Szent Mihály Hill was a suitable place for a sheltered camp, as it was defended by the fortress from the north, by the Mura from the west, and by the fishpond from the east. Additionally, it was possible to make sorties in the south. He put forward a proposition about the reasonable location of the camp already when the Christian army retreated from Kanizsa, but no one would listen to him: "When it came to where the camp should be set up, I definitely recommended that we station the infantry on the hill, in front of my fortress. This way we could still have kept Kanizsa occupied to some extent, we could have secured Zrínyi-Újvár and the Mura, and we would have had the opportunity of wreaking havoc on the enemy every day."<sup>11</sup>

The Ottoman army managed to occupy the plateau in front of the fortress and the hill dominating it without difficulty, from where they were able to besiege the fortress effectively – since it was the only direction from which it was not protected by a watercourse, just by a dry ditch – and control the activity of the Christian camp on the far side of the river. The Grand Vizier thus created the opportunity, seizing the initiative, to launch an attack on the territory of Muraköz, the danger of which had already been emphasised by Zrínyi in 1661, and which motivated him to erect his fortress. For the defence of Muraköz, the most important thing was not to keep the fortress, but to possess the hill. From a tactical point of view, the Christian army could withstand Ottoman attacks effectively with the defence of the fortress and the fortification system established beyond the Mura. However, by giving up the hill, they placed themselves in a highly disadvantageous position strategically. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to say that they suffered defeat. Due to the conditions of the terrain, the besieging army on the hill was in such a protected position that the Christians did not have the opportunity to concentrate enough power for a successful attack. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the fact that this advantageous position was originally supposed to have been taken up by the Christian army. Zrínyi had designed the defence system of the fortress for this purpose, but his fellow commanders gave it up. As a result, they started the fight from a highly disadvantaged position.

<sup>11</sup> The memoirs of Miklós Zrínyi to Leopold I. Vienna, 17 June 1664. See page 286 of the present volume.

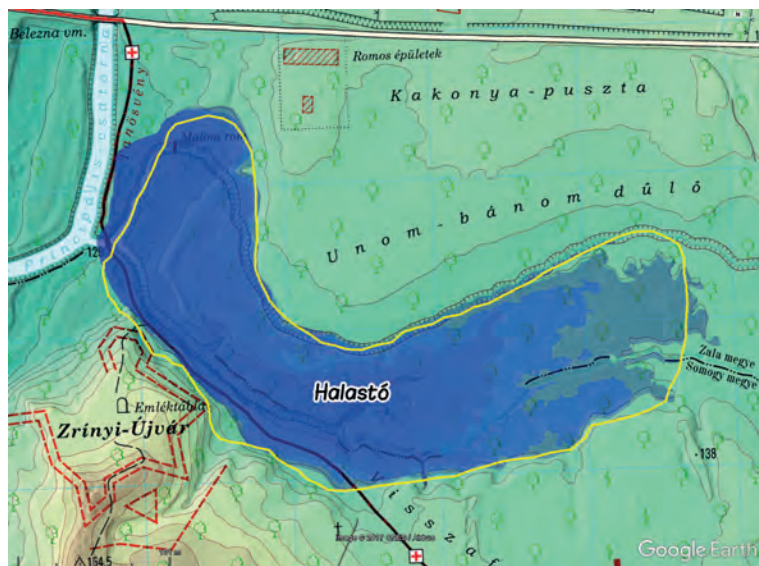


Figure 8.

*The position of the fishpond made by damming the water of Visszafolyó Stream and the fortress*

*Note: Halastó – En: Fishpond; Emléktábla – En: Memorial plaque; Romos épületek – En: Ruined buildings*

*Source: compiled by the author*



Figure 9.

*The eastern side of the former moat today*

*Source: picture made by the author*

It is worth examining to what extent the Ottomans were able to take advantage of this situation. Taking possession of the height offered them the opportunity to launch an unexpected attack on Muraköz when there was no significant military force present to fight against them. In the summer of 1664, however, a strong Christian army camped across the river, which significantly reduced the chance of a successful assault. Furthermore, we cannot ignore either that the Ottomans were most probably not prepared for this.

The army led by Köprülü Ahmed set out with the task of liberating Kanizsa. There was a realistic chance that the besieging army would entrench itself, protracted fights would start, and the relief army could also arrive. The Ottoman Turks originally expected fights to be fought around Kanizsa. However, by giving up the siege and falling back to the Mura, the Christians made the Grand Vizier face a new situation. He had to follow the retreating army, who, by abandoning the plateau in front of the fortress, put the Ottomans in a favourable position. Besides the capture of Zrínyi-Újvár, crossing over the Mura and the seizure of Légrád would have been a success for the 60,000-strong army of the Grand Vizier. Initially, they did not have suitable cannons for starting the siege of the fortress, as they left their siege artillery at Eszék (today Osijek, Croatia). They had seven siege cannons brought from Kanizsa, but until these arrived, they tried to cross the Mura.

In the first days of June they attempted making crossings at several places, but this was prevented by the Christian forces. First, on 4 June, they tried to build a bridge and cross the Mura above the fortress in the shelter of a forest, but their attempt was thwarted. In the evening, they made an attempt to cross at another place hidden by a forest, where the Mura had a bend towards Légrád, but this was foiled by the vigilance of Strozzi's soldiers. Parallel to this, they started to construct ramparts for the cannons opposite the fortress and on the edge of the height overlooking the Mura. During the night of 4 to 5 June and early in the morning, the Ottoman Turks placed four siege guns on the eastern side of the plateau facing the fortress, in the right wing of the local Ottoman forces, which comprised four battalions of infantry Sekbans of the chief serdar, the armed guards of Kara Mustafa Pasha (Beylerbey of Rumelia) and soldiers from the province of Rumelia, the forces of Zaims and Timariots from Anatolia, as well as 200–300 Janissaries. On the western side, the left wing comprised three siege guns, the soldiers of Ismail Pasha (Beylerbey of Bosnia), the Zaims and Timariots from the province of Sivas, as well as 200–300 Janissaries. The siege cannons were used to shoot at the fortress, whereas the large number of 2–3-pound guns set up along the edge of the plateau fired at the bend of the Mura and the area between the Drava and the Mura. The projectiles sometimes hit the imperial camp, as well. In the bend of the Mura, where there was a small island in the vicinity of Légrád, the Ottoman Turks made bulwarks and dug trenches from where most of the island could be swept. At midnight, the Ottomans made another attempt to cross the Mura with a detachment of 300 Janissaries and 300 Sekbans, and they also tried to erect a bridge. At first, 50–60 Janissaries crossed over to the island on rafts and began digging communication trenches at once. Lieutenant General Strozzi, who was nearby, immediately ordered his soldiers to go there from the neighbourhood. However, the terrain was unsuitable for the cavalry to advance. Eventually, he launched an attack with an infantry squadron. At 3 o'clock in the morning, commanded by Captain Quast, they waded across a shallow branch of the Mura – where the water reached only to the waist – but hardly had they got to the island when they were forced to return because of heavy gunfire. They repeated the attack on two more occasions, yet unsuccessfully, because the Ottomans had



made strong defences. However, Strozzi had some guns brought forward, and with these, he isolated the Ottomans from their reinforcements waiting on the opposite bank. At around 6 o'clock in the morning, Lieutenant General Strozzi himself, together with Cuirassier Lieutenant Colonel Piccolomini, 25 cuirassier cavalry soldiers and 150 musketeers crossed the narrow river branch and attacked the Ottoman Turks on the island, and either put them to the sword or drove them into the river, where – except for two Turks – all of them were lost. The fight ended at around 8 o'clock in the morning. Lieutenant General Strozzi called together his remaining soldiers and thanked them for their bravery. During his speech, he was hit in the head by a shot arriving from the opposite bank of the Mura, either from the bulwarks or from the hill. Strozzi fell from his horse and died a few hours later.

The Christian forces managed to recapture the island, but they were kept under fire from the heights on the left bank of the Mura, so Hohenlohe ordered its evacuation. A new defensive line was established along the riverbank. The existing ramparts were linked with communication trenches. Furthermore, in a second line and westwards, a new fortified section of defence was built.

After the unsuccessful attempts at crossing, the Ottomans began the siege of Zrínyi-Újvár. As early as the following day, on 7 June, they started to push forward the approach trenches, which advanced only forty steps that day, but they also built two traverses while the fights continued. On 8 June, shooting at the fortress commenced, but this time without result because all the shots went too high. The following night, the commanders wanted to make a sortie with the aim of destroying the Ottoman siege trenches, but the plan finally failed for the delay of the troops. The garrison of Zrínyi-Újvár was supplemented with a 500-strong imperial infantry unit, which increased the number of defenders to 1,500. As there were not enough buildings for the soldiers to rest, they were replaced every day. General d'Avancourt was in command, and he constantly had the fortifications restored. On 9 June, Hohenlohe made another attempt to invade the aforementioned island. However, Lieutenant Colonel Zobel of Hessen, who had been appointed commander of the assault unit made up of 500 Austrian and 500 German imperial soldiers, was hit by a deadly shot during the commander's muster and thus the plan was abandoned. In the southern corner of the island, a fortification was erected, and a few guards were placed in it.

During that day, the Ottoman approach trenches advanced fifty steps. Just as night fell, the previously schemed sortie was executed, yet with only 300 soldiers instead of the originally planned 1,500 men. The commander, a Lieutenant Colonel from Cologne, penetrated the Ottoman communicating trenches and put some of the guards to the sword, but then he was forced to fall back with great loss. On 10 June, the Ottoman approach trenches were only fifty steps away from the fortress. On the following day (11 June), the Ottomans erected a terrace-like cannon emplacement on the edge of the height facing the Mura, from where they could fire at the flying bridge with two 3-pound guns. With the continuous cannoning, they not only hindered communications, but over time, they also caused the barges holding the bridge to go down in the water.<sup>12</sup> Hohenlohe had a footbridge made below the pontoon bridge, which was less within the range of the shots.

On 12 and 13 June, the Ottomans continued their approach and nearly reached the moat of the fortress, but the defenders thwarted all attempts, partly by sallies and partly by

<sup>12</sup> Pál Esterházy: *Mars Hungaricus*. See page 290 of the present volume.



effective firing. On 14 June, the first 500-strong unit arrived from the main army stationed at Mosonmagyaróvár to augment the Spikh regiment. The Christian army thus already consisted of 10,292 soldiers. In detail, the Strozzi infantry regiment had 1,296 soldiers, the Spikh regiment had 1,037 men, the Spar regiment comprised 602 men, the Bavarians were 843, and the five Salzburg squadrons comprised 564 men. The Piccolomini and Rappach cuirassier regiments had 1,000 horsemen. Hohenlohe's German troops were made up of 3,000 infantrymen and 500 horsemen. Furthermore, there were 300 dragoons, 100–150 Bavarian horsemen and, finally, there was Zrínyi's 1,000-strong army.

On 15 June, Field Marshal Count Montecuccoli, the new Commander-in-Chief, arrived in the camp. The condition of the army was highly unfavourable, which was recorded by the imperial commander in his memoirs as follows: "I found the fortress of Zrínyivár attacked and under siege. Strozzi died in a clash in which he heroically repulsed the Ottomans who wanted to climb the walls. The army was in a miserable state, decreased and almost without officers because most of them lay either wounded or ill. They had to defend the fortress and prevent the enemy from crossing the river over a stretch of several miles. The troops could not rest and were not able to regain their strength because of the continuous and onerous duties they had to carry out on the ramparts. The left bank of the river was in the possession of the enemy. They held the forests and heights above them, and even the bends of the river were favourable to them. Our side was, on the other hand, flat, low-lying, uncovered, open, rugged and dominated. We had neither food nor ammunition, and if Styria had difficulty meeting the army's needs at a time when everything was quiet and the enemy was away, how could it have been expected to supply a larger army when everything and everyone was confused and the Ottomans were facing us?"<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, more and more reinforcements kept coming in. First, on 17 June, the Hungarian army of Count Batthyány Pál arrived, which comprised 600 Hajdús<sup>14</sup> and 1,400 horsemen. They were followed by the Pachonkay dragoon regiment on the same evening. These formed the advance guard of Lieutenant General Spar. On 18 June, Kutsenich's Croatian cavalry regiment and Jaquer's dragoon regiment marched in. On June 19, the 4,000-strong Croatian army of Péter Zrínyi arrived.

On 19 June, the Ottoman siege trenches ran just before the moat of the fortress. As the night fell, the defenders blew up two previously dug-out mines, which destroyed some of the Ottoman approach trenches. On 17 and 19 June, the raiding horsemen of the Christian army shattered an Ottoman cavalry unit and seized a consignment of food. It was during one of the sorties that Farkas Kis, one of the most distinguished officers of Zrínyi fell. (He had entered into the service of Zrínyi escaping from Ottoman territory, and stood out with his talent among the other soldiers.) On 20 June, the Montecuccoli, Spork, La Corona, Schneidau and Spar cavalry regiments, the Hungarian troops of Nádasdy and Esterházy (3,500 Hungarian horsemen and 1,200 Hajdús), as well as the Nassau and Kielmansegg infantry regiments arrived. The troops of Batthyány attacked an Ottoman unit, from which they captured two hundred horses, seven camels and lots of mules, and also they slayed hundreds of the Ottoman Turks.

<sup>13</sup> *Rónai Horváth* 1891. 316–317.

<sup>14</sup> Originally Hungarian armed herdsmen, over time becoming mercenary foot soldiers of lords and princes.



After the arrival of the enforcements, the strength of the Christian army was above 30,000 men. At a war council, Zrínyi proposed that the Ottomans should be attacked as soon as possible, since it was more and more difficult to hold the fortress. Montecuccoli, however, planned another sully for 22 June, with 2,200 German and 500 Hungarian infantrymen, as well as two battalions, comprising 600 men each. On the night of 21 June, the forces crossed the Mura and waited on the alert at the foot of the hill, below the fortress. Parallel to the sortie made from the fortress, 3,000 German and 6,000 Croatian and Hungarian soldiers, led by Péter Zrínyi, were to attack the Ottoman camp in the back, from the direction of Berzence. However, there was excessive rainfall on the following night, which soaked the soil thoroughly and thus the sortie was postponed to 23 June, but it was cancelled again, as an imperial soldier escaped and disclosed the plan to the Ottomans.

Early in the morning of 24 June, another two mines were exploded outside the fortress, which drove the Ottomans away, but, later in the morning, they got close again to the moat of the advanced defensive work. D'Avancourt withdrew the soldiers and placed some bombs in the moat, the blast of which expelled the attackers once again. At night, the Ottomans tried to set the palisades on fire, but the defenders' heavy gunfire repulsed the attack.

On 25 June, two mines were dug beneath the advanced defensive work found in the moat, and one more under the Ottoman trenches. Furthermore, two ramparts were built from where the sides of the protrusion of the advanced defensive work could be swept. At night, the Ottomans attempted a raid on the moat and slayed sixty men from the guard there, but Hohenlohe's troops arrived in time to oust the enemy from the moat again.

It must have been at this time that the catastrophic event recorded by Pál Esterházy without date must have occurred. A fire broke out in the largest bastion of the fortress, where grenades and other firearms were stored, and, in the subsequent explosion, the cannons found there were destroyed and artillerymen were also killed. András Horváth, Zrínyi's prominent officer, the commander of the fortress, was among the victims.

On 28 June, D'Avancourt was wounded by a gunshot leaving Colonel Tasso in command of the defence alone. The following day, the guard was withdrawn from the moat of the fortress after they repelled an Ottoman attack. Throughout the night, the Ottomans broke into the moat several times and managed to set fire to the fortress. At 4 o'clock in the morning, on 30 June, the Ottoman artillery opened fire on the fortress, while the infantry formed assaulting columns. Montecuccoli recorded the capture of the fortress as follows: "Early in the morning, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, the Ottomans exploded a mine below the projection of the ravelin, which partially destroyed the crescent. Field Marshal Spar and I were standing there. The enemy seized the crescent. Subsequently, their columns took their position opposite the open and defenceless sides of the main work and covered themselves with earth and brushwood all around. After making sure that there was no other means of defence in these places than a small ditch and the posts of a palisade, I told Colonel Tasso (if he can no longer defend the fortress) to have timber parts and barracks torched in good time, pull out the troops from the stronghold, have the mines drilled beneath the fortress exploded, and blow up the fortress, for it is customary to do so with works that can no longer be defended. In the end, he should lead the defenders over the bridge and demolish the bridge, while making sure that the men do not push one another causing thus confusion. – The commander of the fortress [Tasso] believed he would be able to hold the place to the following day. But hardly had we left the fortress with Spar when the enemy made such a fierce assault

on the aforementioned parts of the defensive line that the defensive troops got extremely alarmed and fled. There was no time either to blow up the fortress or to demolish the bridge. Less than one-third of the 1,700 defenders, perhaps no more than 300 men, escaped. Thus, instead of 800 soldiers, nearly 1,400 were lost. Colonel Tasso suffered a fatal sword cut to the head, but he still managed to escape. The Ottomans also lost 500 men, who were killed and there were also many wounded.”<sup>15</sup> Miklós Zrínyi reported that there were only 350 German soldiers at the ramparts as the evacuation of the fortress had already started, and when fifty Ottoman Turks armed sabres stormed out of the trenches and broke into the fortress, the defenders fled panic-stricken. They left the gate of the tunnel open which provided access to the moat, and the Ottomans could enter the fortress through that.<sup>16</sup>

During the siege, the defence system of the fortress hindered the defenders rather than helped them. Montecuccoli remarked annoyingly: “It was also unsuitable for sorties on account of the steep slope and the hills opposite.”<sup>17</sup> He was right in that respect. Finally, to solve the problem, it was even suggested that “such small fortlets, which were built on the side of a river where the enemy’s army camped and to where only small reinforcements could be sent under the enemy’s nose, were normally given up. Baron D’Avancour repeatedly advised us to do so, committing himself to build a better one in eight days after the enemy’s army left.”<sup>18</sup>

If Zrínyi’s suggestion had been accepted and the army had camped on the plateau in front of the fortress, the eastern side of the camp would have been protected by the valley of the Visszafolyó Stream, with a well-guarded crossing. On the western side, using the crossing established at the foot of Szent Mihály Hill, the troops would have been able to cross hidden from the eyes of the Ottomans and the camp could have received supplies. Southwards, the plateau of the hill would have been a terrain suitable for sallies and even major assaults.

The problem was not caused by the fortress itself, because, as an establishment securing the crossing, it was part of a well-constructed defence system. The real problem was that the commanders of the Christian army and Miklós Zrínyi were of different opinions. During the retreat from Kanizsa, the Christian leaders considered that the army could be positioned more safely beyond the Mura. They regarded the fortress as a bridgehead, which, under favourable conditions, made possible crossing the river before the attack. Zrínyi was aware of the defensive system of his fortress, and he knew that by giving up the plateau in front of the fortress, the Christian forces camping on the other side of the river would find themselves in a disadvantageous position. He was probably not able to make his fellow commanders understand that Zrínyi-Újvár, despite the fact that it secured a ford from the bank of the Mura, was not a bridgehead, but the best location for camping from a military operational perspective. Later, when the Christian commanders also recognised this, they found the building inadequate as a fortress.

<sup>15</sup> *Rónai Horváth* 1891. 316–317.

<sup>16</sup> The memoirs of Miklós Zrínyi to Leopold I. See page 287 of the present volume.

<sup>17</sup> Raimondo Montecuccoli: *Relazione della campagna dell’ Armata Cesarea nell’ Anno MDCLXIV*. See page 295 of the present volume.

<sup>18</sup> Raimondo Montecuccoli: *Relazione della campagna dell’ Armata Cesarea nell’ Anno MDCLXIV*. See page 295 of the present volume.

## Summary

The protection of Muraköz against attacks coming from areas occupied by the Ottomans was primarily provided by the Mura. Crossing over the fast-flowing river full of whirlpools was only possible after careful technical preparation and at given places. The first element in the defensive system set up by Zrínyi was the Légrád Castle built on the bank of the Drava to close up the river and prevent Ottoman ships from entering the territory of Muraköz.

From Légrád to Csáktornya, there was a chain of outposts positioned at a safe distance from the bank of the river, because on the side of Kanizsa, the forces by the riverbank could be easily attacked from the height between Örtilos and Kakonya. Between Kanizsa and Csáktornya, the Kakonya Ford offered the best possibility for crossing and thus its safe-keeping and possession was of decisive importance. Initially, Zrínyi secured that place with a fortification erected on the right bank. However, in 1661, along with the construction of Zrínyi-Újvár, he eliminated all those natural conditions that rendered this place suitable for crossing. He flooded the road leading there in the valley of the Visszafolyó Stream and the surrounding area by building a dam on the stream. The ford established under Zrínyi-Újvár was located in a place that was hard to approach, which allowed the full control of traffic from the fortress. At the same time, I must emphasise that the Kakonya Ford, which was the best crossing place for an Ottoman assault on Muraköz from the direction of Kanizsa, became unsuitable for this purpose after 1661, due to the transformation of the area. Several decades passed after the fall of the fortress until the landscape restored to such an extent that the positive features for the crossing would appear again.

In 1664, the Ottoman army prepared to fight for the liberation of Kanizsa. As the besieging Christian army retreated to Zrínyi-Újvár, the Grand Vizier was given the opportunity to take the fortress. In the beginning, this was only regarded as a secondary objective, and the focus was rather on crossing the Mura and clashing with the Christian army that camped on the other side of the river. After the failure of this, the importance of seizing the fortress increased. Zrínyi-Újvár was an earthwork fortification of small size, the capture of which could have hardly represented a problem for an approximately 60,000-strong Ottoman army, but after a quick victory the emphasis would have been shifted to a confrontation with the Christian army behind the Mura, which was not successful until then. It was, therefore, in the interest of the Grand Vizier to present the occupation of Zrínyi-Újvár as the greatest possible accomplishment and to interpret its capture as a victory. To this end, he carried out a regular siege, with large-scale technical works, but only with seven siege cannons transported there from Kanizsa, because the guns suitable for this remained at Eszék. Since the question of Zrínyi-Újvár had been regularly raised at diplomatic talks since 1661, the general public held it to be an important stronghold. The Grand Vizier merely had to reinforce this view by carrying out a large-scale and long siege and thus increase the value of taking the fortress and make it seem like a major victory.