

BALÁZS SUDÁR

THE BATTLE OF ZSARNÓCA (1664) – THROUGH OTTOMAN EYES

In the course of the 1663–1664 Habsburg–Ottoman war, the grand vezir Fazil Ahmed Pasha arrived to the Hungarian marches in 1663, and caused considerable losses there: he took the castle of Érsekújvár, and thereby practically severed the upper Hungarian counties from the small remainig part of the kingdom. In the current state of affairs, each victory had more than average importance, not only militarily but also from the perspective of public feeling. It is thus not surprising that these generated high-sounding accounts, taken over by later historiography as well. Exactly such an event was the battle of Zsarnóca on 16 May 1664.

According to their own reports, the Christians won a great victory, and even the enemy commander was said to have died in the encounter. Ottoman sources, on the other hand, report on no such thing, no defeat is mentioned, and the Ottoman leaders continued to figure in later events, a clear indication that they did not die. What happened then? The Christians probably remembered their success in preventing the pursuing Ottomans from annihilating them, which enabled them to retreat in a more or less orderly way from the siege of Léva. Under the given circumstances, it was indeed quite an achievement. For their part, the Ottomans opined that their primary task was not the annihilation of the enemy host, but the relief of Léva. This they in fact achieved, and the action was thus regarded as a success. This, however, only reflected two different perspectives: while the Christians emphasised but one episode of the campaign, the Ottomans regarded the whole sequence of events.