

*Małgorzata Dąbrowska*

(Łódź)

## Uzun Hasan's Project of Alliance with the Polish King (1474)\*

We might have got Constantinople. This is what the reader could think while reading the account of Polish chronicler Długosz. He gave us a detailed description of the proposal that was made to the King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Casimir the Jagiellonian by Uzun Hasan, the ruler of Turcoman tribe Ak-Koyunlu (White Sheep). The knowledge of this fact has been confined to one statement written by O. Halecki. Babinger also mentions it but cursorily<sup>1</sup>. Such is the fate of borderline topics<sup>2</sup>. Thus, nobody has written a detailed analysis of the event, let alone examined the account by Długosz.

Długosz says that on 6 February 1474 two Venetian envoys visited the Polish King. Paul who went by name of Omnibene and Anthony offered some damask embroidered with the golden thread as a gift for Casimir. One of the envoys was going to depart to Uzun Hasan's country via Caffa. The latter who had been sent by the Pope was bound for Moscow. The King provided them with the bodyguards. Approximately at the same time a Venetian named Catherino Zeno appeared at the Polish court. He brought a letter from Uzun Hasan written in Chaldean. Pointing out his own successes in the campaign against the Turks Uzun insisted that the

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<sup>1</sup> O. Halecki, *La Pologne et l'Empire Byzantin*, Byzantion 7(1932) 66. F. Babinger mentions Zeno's stay in Poland but he does not say anything about Hasan's proposal, F. Babinger, *Z dziejów Imperium Osmanów. Mehmed Zdobywca i jego czasy*, trans. T. Zabłudowski, Warszawa 1977, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> I alluded to that in my article: *From Poland to Tenedos. The Project of Using the Teutonic Order in the Fight against the Turks after the Fall of Constantinople*, note 51 (to be published in Mainz by G. Prinzing).

King should start the war against Mehmed II in the spring of 1474. Uzun Hasan volunteered to provide the army that could consist of ten times one hundred thousand soldiers. Długosz says that Catherino Zeno had previously stayed at Uzun Hasan's court for three years as the Venetian envoy. The chronicler highlights the facts that Zeno was present during the victorious battle of Uzun Hasan at Erzincan. He goes on to say that Zeno had also been sent as an envoy to the Pope, France, Naples, Hungary and Venice. According to Długosz the mission contained a confidential message. Uzun Hasan offered his elder daughter born by Catherina of Trebizond to one of royal sons. He added that she would be baptized. As dowry he offered the whole Greek State (*omne Graecorum Imperium*) which would become Casimir's property after expelling Mehmed from Constantinople. He promised to support the King in his conflict with Matthias Corvinus of Hungary and he acknowledged the King's rights to Bohemia and Hungary. Długosz expresses his delight at the proposal which was so friendly and he voices his astonishment at the King's indifference. Casimir said he would send the reply via his own envoy and he sent Catherino to Hungary with an escort<sup>3</sup>. That is the end of the passage.

Around February 1475, while the King was staying in Lithuania another envoy from Uzun Hasan appeared before him in the company of twelve riders. It was Isaac of Trebizond, of Greek origin but of Muslim religion. He asked the King to kindly start the war in the spring of that year. This time Uzun Hasan offered three times one hundred thousand soldiers. He emphasized the fact that Mehmed's power had already been undermined. *Providing him with some gifts the King sent the envoy to Cracow because it was Isaac's dream to see it.* The envoy spent the whole month there which surprised Długosz. Afterwards Isaac went to Hungary and Venice. That is the end of the second passage<sup>4</sup>.

Once again the King demonstrated his independence towards the matter. Since nothing came out of it, the historians never explored the issue. However it is interesting to see what chances there were for this undertaking and why it came to nothing. First of all we have to analyse the source. Długosz lived in the time of the above events. He worked in the royal diplomacy, he taught the royal sons. Even if he did not witness the arrival of envoys he must have seen the letters which he quotes.

The fight against Mehmed had long been on the chronicler's mind. He followed the situation in Asia Minor and noted down the victory of Uzun Hasan over Mehmed in 1473<sup>5</sup>. However he failed to mention Hasan's defeat

<sup>3</sup> *Ioanni Długossii Historiae Polonicae libri XII*, in: *Opera omnia*, ed. K. Przędziecki, vol. 14, Kraków 1878, p. 601–602.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 626.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 589–590.



which took place a week later<sup>6</sup>. His information came from Zeno who must have concealed the fact of the defeat for propaganda reasons. In his account of the first battle Długosz is precise enough to mention Uzun Hasan's sons who took part in the fights. He estimated Hasan's military power as one hundred fifty thousand soldiers<sup>7</sup>. The whole account links up with the earlier information from 1472 when Długosz wrote about Uzun Hasan's alliance with the Pope and Venice against Mehmed<sup>8</sup>.

In the light of the Polish chronicle the initiative of the alliance in 1474 came from Uzun Hasan who had been well up on the political situation in Central-Eastern Europe and he had regarded Casimir as a suitable partner for his plans. If one looks at the map s/he will see that the result would be an outflanking manoeuvre for Mehmed's Empire. If one also consider the fact that the Jagiellons ruled in the Kingdom of Poland, the Great Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Bohemia and held sway over Moldavia and even Caffa on the Crimean, the whole idea seems very tempting. Let us have a look at the facts. The analysis of Turkish sources by a prewar Polish scholar E. Zawaliński shows that the issue of the supposed alliance between Uzun Hasan and Casimir had not left any trace<sup>9</sup>. Sphrantzes managed to write only about the fight between Uzun and Mehmed in 1473. The Anonymus Greek Chronicle from the 16th century describes the career of Uzun Hasan and his family but does not contain any mention of the Polish episode<sup>10</sup>. The silence of Eastern sources seems to reflect the actual state of things. In fact it was not Uzun Hasan but Venice which came up with the proposal of alliance. In 1470 Venice lost *Negroponte* and realised that it was no longer possible to flirt with Mehmed<sup>11</sup>. Uzun Hasan as a potential ally had drawn the attention of the *Serenissima* much earlier. Besides, the slogan of anti-Turkish crusade had been in circulation in Europe especially since the fall of Constantinople. It was particularly propagated by the Papacy which wanted to involve Poland

<sup>6</sup> F. Babinger, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

<sup>7</sup> J. Długosz, *op. cit.*, p. 590. Cf. *Rozbiór krytyczny Annalium Poloniae Jana Długosza z lat 1445–1480*, vol. 2, ed. S. Gawęda, K. Pieradzka, J. Radziszewska, supervised by J. Dąbrowski, Warszawa–Kraków 1965, p. 307–308.

<sup>8</sup> I. Długosz, *op. cit.*, p. 569. Długosz's library has not come down to us. But it is known to have been very rich and it might have included some works on the Turks. This is probably why he was so well informed about the Turkish issue. Cf. W. Swojda, *Głosy tureckie do rozbioru krytycznego „Annalium” Jana Długosza*, *Studia Źródłoznawcze*, 27(1983) 80.

<sup>9</sup> E. Zawaliński, *Polska w kronikach tureckich XV i XVI w.*, Stryj 1938.

<sup>10</sup> Georgios Sphrantzes, *Memorii 1401–1477*, ed. V. Grecu, Bucarest 1966, p. 142; *Emperors, Patriarchs and Sultans of Constantinople 1373–1513. An Anonymous Greek Chronicle of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. M. Philippides, Brookline Mass. 1990, p. 124–130.

<sup>11</sup> N. Housley, *The Later Crusades. From Lyons to Alcazar 1274–1580*, Oxford 1992, p. 110.

in the matter already at that stage<sup>12</sup>. The geographical location seems to suggest that Hasan's participation in the enterprise was a big advantage. Uzun Hasan ruled in the vast areas of Iran (Długosz calls him Persian King). Being the ruler of the tribe of White Sheep he had good European connections. Due to his marriage to the daughter of John IV of Trebizond, he was connected with Byzantine and Italian families. Catherino Zeno was his wife's relative<sup>13</sup>. Thus Casimir was visited by somebody who knew a lot about everything that was happening in the East and the West. The same goes for Isaac, the other envoy who also came from Trebizond and seems to have been well informed. The Empire of Trebizond fell in 1461. Mehmed took the last ruler David II to his court, but when he noticed the captive's contacts with Uzun Hasan he had him executed<sup>14</sup>. Mehmed wanted to sever the emotional links between Trebizond and Uzun Hasan. Still, Uzun aspired to recapture his wife's fatherland from Mehmed. So, the actual course of events was that it was Venice which sent Catherino Zeno to Uzun Hasan, organising a great political action after the loss of Negroponte. Venice formed a coalition with the Pope and the Kingdom of Naples. Sixtus IV, the Pope from 1471, supported the crusade which included 89 galleys. The allied forces under the leadership of Cardinal Caraffa and Doge Mocenigo set off towards the East. They attacked Smyrna and Attaleia. However, the expedition was disrupted by the conflict between Venice and Naples<sup>15</sup>. The crusade was made to take place at the same time as Hasan's invasion in the East. In 1473 Uzun defeated Mehmed at Erzincan but a week later he was beaten as had already been said<sup>16</sup>. It shows that Italy was not able to create a military movement against Mehmed. No wonder that Venice turned its attention to the North, especially to Poland. The Papacy did the same sending Marco Barbo who appeared at the Polish court on 4 August 1472. His mission continued the previous military action of joined papal-Venetian forces. Marco Barbo was to put an end to the conflict between Casimir and Corvinus of Hungary

<sup>12</sup> M. Dąbrowska, *From Poland to Tenedos...*

<sup>13</sup> The White Sheep competed with the Black one and Uzun Hasan was the winner. His state was hardly civilised but it held sway over a large territory. His wife's sister was the spouse of Niccolo Crispo, the ruler of Archipel. Their daughters were married off to Venetian nobles, Violanta becoming Catherino Zeno's wife. Thus for Hasan's wife Zeno was her niece's husband.

<sup>14</sup> W. Miller, *Trebizond. The Last Greek Empire*, London 1926, p. 105–112; E. Janssens, *Trebizonde en Colchide*, Bruxelles 1969, p. 160–162.

<sup>15</sup> E. Armstrong, *The Papacy and Naples in the Fifteenth Century*, in: *The Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. C. W. Previle-Orton and Z. N. Brooke, vol. 8, Cambridge 1936, p. 192.

<sup>16</sup> I. Czamańska, *Moldawia i Wołoszczyzna wobec Polski, Węgier i Turcji w XIV i XV wieku*, Poznań 1996, p. 135 claims that Uzun was eliminated from the fight in 1473 but I disagree with that opinion. Hasan was still seen as a potential and necessary ally against Mehmed.



and encourage Casimir to join the anti-Turkish coalition<sup>17</sup>. But the political option of Polish King was quite different.

Uzun Hasan's forces were dispersed but not completely defeated if the next year, that is in 1474 he came up with the proposal of alliance with Poland which might have been suggested by Venice. The propaganda spread by both embassies stressed Hasan's victory and showed Mehmed as the one who could be defeated. The idea seemed very attractive to Długosz. He pointed out that the vicinity of Moldavia made it impossible to avoid the conflict with the Turks in the long run. He was right. Also the Lithuanians whose Ruthenian territories bordered upon Moldavia encouraged the King to prepare the war. However, the King did not share their anxiety. What was the reason for that lack of response?

Moldavia certainly played the role of a decisive factor. The Great Prince Stephen the Great appealed to Polish and Hungarian protection so as to avoid Mehmed's invasion. This politics necessarily involved Casimir in the Turkish issues which he had wanted to postpone<sup>18</sup>. The King did not intend to attack the Turks which is why he sent the Hasan's envoys back. In 1475 the Turks got hold of Caffa which had also treated Casimir as its protector but he was not willing to take that role. A question can be raised why Casimir allowed Mehmed for the liberty whose result was the capture of Kilia and Akkerman, the main Moldavian harbours in 1484?

It should be stressed that ambitious Moldavia tried to gain Wallachia and wanted to involve Casimir in these efforts. In fact, Stephen of Moldavia did not want to attack Turks. However, his invasion on Wallachia was an indirect challenge to the Turks. In the autumn 1473 Stephen attacked Radu, the Wallachian ruler. Radu escaped to Turkey which provoked its immediate response. Radu regained his throne and the conflict between Moldavia and Wallachia turned into the one between Moldavia and Turkey<sup>19</sup>. Stephen started to appeal to Casimir at the beginning of 1474 reminding him of the sovereign's duties<sup>20</sup>. Poland did nothing. At that

<sup>17</sup> M. Biskup, K. Górski, *Kazimierz Jagiellończyk. Zbiór studiów o Polsce drugiej połowy XV wieku*, Warszawa 1987, p. 289.

<sup>18</sup> I. Czamańska, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 135–136. Z. Kiereś, *Zagadnienie konfliktu polsko-tureckiego w drugiej połowie XV wieku. Kwestia czarnomorska w okresie rządów Kazimierza Jagiellończyka (do 1484)*, *Śląskie Studia Historyczne* 3(1977) 46. The author points out that Stephen did not take advantage of Mehmed's fight with Uzun Hasan and did not attack Radu in Wallachia. Radu was to send 12 thousand soldiers to support Mehmed. The attack on Radu in the autumn 1473 was pointless because Mehmed might have taken its side which he did. Kiereś sees Venice's influence in that. As early as in 1471 Venice considered Moldavia as a potential ally against Turkey.

<sup>20</sup> I. Czamańska, *op. cit.*, p. 136. See also: B. Stachoń, *Polska wobec Turcji i akcji antytureckiej do utraty Kilii i Białogrodu*, *Archiwum Towarzystwa Naukowego we Lwowie*, Wyzd. II, 7(1930) 2, 171.

particular moment Uzun Hasan's envoy appeared at the court with no result. The Turks invaded Moldavia at the beginning of 1475. Stephen was not completely defeated but he became involved in the Black Sea conflict. In the spring of 1475 Stephen lent his assistance to Caffa in the time of siege but on 6 June the city was taken. The Turks were joined by Mengi Girej's Tartars from the Crimean Horde which was rather dangerous for Moldavia<sup>21</sup>. Stephen turned to the Hungarian King and only that caused Polish anxiety. The result was that Polish gentry insisted that Moldavia should not be handed over to the Turks. Thus, Poland launched a military action in 1476 which had been preceded by the embassy sent to Mehmed. Casimir pointed that the sultan had attacked his vassal<sup>22</sup>. But this did not stop Mehmed from invading Moldavia. The Sultan did not want Poland to get involved in the conflict so he sent a conciliatory message to the King<sup>23</sup>. It is essential to note that the Turks did not regard Poland as their opponent. They realised it was Moldavia that wanted the Polish King to join the conflict<sup>24</sup>. Evidently, Casimir did not want to stand up against Turkey. He did not and could not do it. His refusal to take Hasan's side must be considered in this context. At the same time he turned down the Venetian proposal. Casimir wanted to keep his position in Moldavia but he avoided the conflict with the Turks. His attention was not focussed on the southern-eastern areas.

Let us consider the situation of Polish Kingdom at that time. Casimir the Jagiellonian had been ruling in the united state of Poland and Lithuania since 1447. As early as the beginning of his reign he was preoccupied with the issue of regaining Pomerania of Gdańsk from the Teutonic Order. As a result he got involved in the 13 year war with the Knights. He was not supported by the Roman Curia which took side of the Teutonic Knights<sup>25</sup>. The long struggle ended with the treaty of Thorn in 1466 but the Papacy agreed to accept it on condition that Casimir would defeat George of Podebrady and the Hussites<sup>26</sup>. Casimir's dynastic plans took

<sup>21</sup> Z. Kiereś, *op. cit.*, 52; I. Czamańska, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>22</sup> In 1476 Casimir stood up for Moldavia recruiting levy in mass from Ruthenia. The army gathered near Kamieniec. But the fight never took place because the Turkish army managed to disappear. Z. Kiereś, *op. cit.*, p. 56, B. Stachoń, *op. cit.*, p. 181. Casimir must have approved of that as he did not want to get involved. Długosz regrets that the King never took advantage of Turk's weakness. Instead, the King went hunting which Długosz bitterly resents. I. Długoss, *op. cit.*, p. 646.

<sup>23</sup> As early as in 1475 Mehmed assured Casimir that he hoped for the brotherhood and friendship with Poland to last long. Cf.: *Codex epistolaris saeculi decimi quinti*, ed. A. Lewicki, vol. 3, Cracoviae 1894, n. 204.

<sup>24</sup> E. Zawaliński, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> M. Biskup, K. Górski, *op. cit.*, p. 189-215.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 287.



Bohemia into account. Accordingly, in 1471 after George's death, Casimir made his eldest son Ladislas King of Bohemia. The young ruler was 15 years old<sup>27</sup>. This did not meet with the approval of Matthias Corvinus from Hungary who also claimed rights to Bohemia. Because of his marriage to Elisabeth of Habsburg, Casimir thought he was entitled to both thrones. Elisabeth was Albrecht's daughter, who was the ruler of Germany, the King of Bohemia and Hungary<sup>28</sup>. As Ladislas was quite young and did not have substantial income, Casimir had to take the burden of maintaining Jagiellonian rule in Bohemia. The Polish state was considerably weakened by the war with the Teutonic Order. The treasury had incurred debts, the army that consisted of levy in mass was badly trained and lacked discipline. Corvinus was in a much better situation. The revenue of his state was greater. At that time – four hundred thousand Hungarian zlotys whereas Poland had eighty thousand zlotys, that is five times less<sup>29</sup>. Thus Corvinus had the funds to recruit the soldiers who were well trained. Since he disapproved of the Jagiellonian rule in Bohemia he aimed at the military confrontation which actually took place in the autumn 1474. These data are invaluable to realise the position of Poland when Uzun Hasan sought its help. What could he possibly count on? Theoretically Poland united with Lithuania was a great country and had a military potential at her disposal. Practically it was weakened by the war with the Teutonic Order and threatened by Corvinus. Uzun could not therefore count on Casimir whose attention was turned to the south-west. Even Mehmed realised that he was safe from the danger of Polish or Hungarian invasion because the two countries were in great conflict.

It is interesting to note that Venice carried on very clever policy, using Uzun Hasan in negotiations with Poland. Allied with the Papacy, Venice was very suspect to Poland. The King was constantly aware of the fact that the Pope might take back his approval of the treaty of Thorn which would make Poland lose the access to the Baltic Sea. Casimir feared all the connections that might lend the Teutonic Order additional support. Corvinus was soon to adopt such a role<sup>30</sup>. In 1474 a war between Poland and Hungary broke out in Silesia. It was obviously the war for claim to

<sup>27</sup> K. Baczkowski, *Walka Jagiellonów z Maciejem Korwinem o koronę czeską w latach 1471–1479*, Kraków 1980, p. 37–45.

<sup>28</sup> M. Biskup, K. Górski, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>29</sup> K. Baczkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 34. Poland and Lithuania had separate treasuries. The King borrowed money from the nobles and the city of Cracow. The yearly board of a thousand mercenary riders cost 24 thousand Hungarian zlotys which was one third of the Polish Kingdom's income. Thus the King could only use the army for a short time which made the long campaigns impossible.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134.

Bohemia and Silesia was its military theatre. Poland recruited about fifty thousand armed men which was the maximum of its military capability. The army was mainly recruited from the territory of Poland as the King did not want to involve Lithuania in the conflict. The reason was his fear that the Lithuanian nobles might demand a separate ruler as their Duke. Corvinus had fewer soldiers (ten thousand) but they were very well trained<sup>31</sup>.

Poland did not have a proper army to speak of. The gentry had not taken part in the war for more than ten years. Casimir himself did not have any military skill. Only ten thousand men in the Polish army were equipped in a Western fashion. Besides, the war was waged for Bohemia but the King had to wait for Bohemian army. The Polish gentry was ill-disposed to the Silesian war. Even before their departure the nobles asked the King for gratification. Długosz writes that the gentry was dissatisfied with what was going on in Podolia which faced the Tartar danger<sup>32</sup>. Thus it can be interferred that the gentry might have been encouraged to fight in the East if the King had not been opposed to it. The Silesian war ended with the defeat of Poland but Ladislas managed to keep Bohemia<sup>33</sup>.

In February 1475 the Turks attacked Hungary. Matthiew spread the successful propaganda which was supported by Pope Sixtus IV. On 15 February 1476 Matthiew defeated Turks at Subocz but he returned to Buda on 1 March. The Curia was disappointed<sup>34</sup>. Corvinus did not stop his hostilities against Poland. It was under his influence that the papal nuntio excommunicated King Casimir on 15 January 1478 and declared Pomerania and the Teutonic Order free from the Polish rule<sup>35</sup>. Trying to disrupt the Hungarian-Teutonic alliance Casimir led to the treaty at Buda where Ladislas and Corvinus were placed on equal footing as Bohemian rules<sup>36</sup>. Each side had now the same rights in the fight for Bohemian throne.

These events can be a comment on the years 1474–1475 when the envoys from Uzun appeared. Indeed, Poland did not have time for Hasan. Besides, the dynastic policy of Jagiellons was difficult to carry out. Elisabeth of Habsburg's rights were not favourably looked at by the Polish gentry. The only advantage was that Poland managed to save Bohemia for the Jagiellons. Because of the weak army Casimir was a loser in his conflict with Corvinus. The same thing might have happened in the case of

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 106–107.

<sup>32</sup> I. Długosz, *op. cit.*, p. 607–609.

<sup>33</sup> K. Baczkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 120. I bypass all the diplomatic relations between Poland and German princes. They played an important role in the conflict between Casimir and Corvinus.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 157–158.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 163.



Polish-Turkish confrontation. However, it is not altogether impossible that the war against the Turks would have seem more attractive to the gentry. Let us mention the gathering of the levy in mass from Ruthenian territories of Lithuania for the war in Moldavia. Obviously, we can only speculate because the Turks did not attack Poland directly. What is more, they were willing to support Casimir's claim to Hungary which certainly place them in a better light<sup>37</sup>.

It is evident that Venice disapproved Polish attitude to the Turkish question. The proof for that can be found in a treatise written by Philippe Buonacorsi called Callimachus, an Italian diplomate who served at Casimir's court. The text is a good depiction of the Polish court's attitude to the anti-Turkish propaganda. The title itself is quite striking: „On Venetian attempts to use Persians and Tartars against Turkey”<sup>38</sup>. Callimachus mentions Uzun's victory and Catherino Zeno's embassy pointing to the Papacy and Venice as responsible for the anti-Turkish opinions<sup>39</sup>. He emphasizes the fact that Venice tried to gain Tartars' assistance in the fight. This made the Polish King and his Council very anxious because they feared that Tartars might invade Poland if they were made to feel men confident<sup>40</sup>. It was believed that Venice wanted to steer clear of the war and let it happen somewhere else. „One cannot count on unreliable Tartars. They can just as well take the side of the Turks who might later attack Poland”<sup>41</sup>. The opponents of this opinion claimed that alliance with Venice in the defence of Christendom would be a honourable thing<sup>42</sup>. Callimachus may be voicing his own stand here. Aware of his limitations, the King did not want to get involved in the conflict. Besides, he realized that the Tartars were not seen as a trustworthy supporters. This was soon to be demonstrated by the facts. It was rather absurd to take part in the war side by side with Venice while other political powers remained passive, for example the Empire of Frederick III. Callimachus clearly advocated the Venetian project and shows the Polish court as people who sit on the fence. In fact Callimachus was more loyal to Venice than to Poland. He used a secret code in his correspondence with Serenissima. Casimir was right not to trust him.

In 1475 the Turks captured Caffa and the Crimean Tartars accepted the Turkish support. At the beginning of the same year Uzun Hasan sent

<sup>37</sup> Z. Kiereś, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> Ph. Callimachi, *De his quae a Venetis tentata sunt Persis ac Tartaris contra Turcos movendis*, ed. A. Kempfi et T. Kowalewski, Varsoviae 1962.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40-42.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 74.

his second envoy to Casimir but with no result. Only the sack of Caffa made him realize the danger. In May 1476 Mehmed received the Polish embassy and assured them that he was going to continue his peaceful rebations with Poland. It was to happen at the expense of Moldavia which turned out to be less important.

Having achieved hardly anything, Venice concluded a treaty with Mehmed in 1479. It accepted the fact that Negroponte had been lost. Besides, it had to give up a part of Albania and pay ten thousand ducates in return for the right to the trade within the Ottoman Empire<sup>43</sup>. Its selfish policy became apparent at that moment. Accordingly, the Polish King did right when refusing to ally himself with Uzun, that means – with Venice. In 1489 Poland drew up its own treaty with the Turks. It granted Polish merchants the right to trade in the Black Sea region<sup>44</sup>. Both, Poland and Venice saved their respective interests however each did that independently.

Uzun Hasan died in 1478. His death did not put an end to the power of Ak-Koyunlu. Although his Trebizondian wife provoked the domestic war against Uzun's son by the first wife, the state was bound to last much longer<sup>45</sup>. It was only sultan Selim (1512–1520) who defeated Uzun Hasan's grandson. Thus, Ak-Koyunlu was a potential ally for Casimir. But the Polish King could only find this ally exotic. Hasan could not attract the King by flaunting his Trebizondian and Byzantine connections which were indifferent for Casimir. The fact that Uzun offered Byzantium to Poland can only be seen as history's joke. The same goes for beautiful Trebizondian fiancée. We can only speculate who might have been the beauty's partner? Ladislav of Bohemia, the eldest son was eighteen, Casimir (the later saint) was sixteen, John Albert was fifteen, Alexander – thirteen, Sigismund and Frederick were too young – seven and six respectively. Uzun's daughter was about twelve, perhaps<sup>46</sup>. Casimir's six sons constituted a rich matrimonial offer but nobody wanted to sacrifice any of them in the Turkish war, even if Constantinople were to be a reward.

Casimir was a very pragmatic ruler. Had this appeal been directed to John Albert, a great enthusiast, things might have taken a different course. This one however lost his own battle with the Turks in 1497. Still, the Byzantine connections reached Poland. Alexander, Casimir's fourth son and the future Polish King married Helen, daughter of Ivan III of Muscovy

<sup>43</sup> N. Housley, *op. cit.*, p. 110. Housley uses the expression: Casimir of Lithuania–Poland (111) which is not precise. Casimir was the King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania.

<sup>44</sup> M. Biskup, K. Górski, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>45</sup> *Emperors, Patriarchs...*, p. 124.

<sup>46</sup> His eldest daughter was already married in 1472. He had two other daughters: Eliel and Eziel. The elder might have been twelve then. Cf. M. Kuršanskis, *Autour de la dernière princesse de Trébizonde: Théodore, fille de Jean IV et épouse d'Uzun Hasan*, Archeion Pontou 34(1977–1978) 86.



and Zoe Palaeologina. But they were childless so the Byzantine blood never got to Jagiellons' veins. It is interesting to ask whether Mehmed reckoned with the possibility of Poland's participation in anti-Turkish campaign. He was preparing Stambul for defence in 1473–1474<sup>47</sup> but he probably did not expect the Polish forces to attack it. Poland could only invade Stambul from the land since it had no fleet. But Venice had its fleet so if they had formed alliance and if Uzun Hasan had joined it, who knows what would have happened? This is, however, an alternative history.

Casimir, whose relations with the Curia that is Venice's main ally were a bit strained because of the Teutonic Order did not want this alliance. He did not want to involve Poland in the conflict with the Turks, he did not want to involve Lithuania either. He knew, he would pay a high political price for it. He promoted his dynasty in central Europe which yielded fruit after Corvinus' death in 1490. Then Ladislas the Jagiellonian who was already ruling in Bohemia became the King of Hungary. Still, it must be stressed that Poland united with Lithuania constituted a great power and therefore it was a target of diplomatic attempts by many states. Only a person who was well up on Polish situation could be aware of the shortcomings in the army.

So far it is a nice story which allows for a flight of imagination. But what, if Uzun Hasan's offer was fictitious? Venetian sources prove particularly useful since they throw a great deal of light on the matter. Uzun's proposition arouses suspicions since he offers absolutely astounding number of soldiers to the Polish King. Moreover, his matrimonial proposal and the dowry are simply incredible. It is difficult to state that the letter sent to Casimir had been faked. Długosz definitely comments on a letter written in Chaldean. It must be admitted, however, that such forgeries had not been uncommon in Europe before. The example can be provided by a letter urging Christendom to the crusade allegedly written by David II, Emperor of Trebizond<sup>48</sup>. According to Długosz, the name of Hasan's wife was Catherina and not Theodora which was actually the case. However, her Christian name does not appear in the sources. Even the Venetian sources call her Despina Caton<sup>49</sup>.

Accordingly, if the message to Casimir was written in Chaldean, it certainly should not have referred to the lady in question as Catherina. This fact makes the reader approach to Długosz's account with reservation. The question whether the letter was genuine or faked must be raised.

<sup>47</sup> F. Babinger, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>48</sup> The forgery was brought to light by A. Bryer, *Ludovico da Bologna and the Georgian and Anatolian Embassy of 1460–1461*, *Bedi Kartlisa* 19–20(1965) = *The Empire of Trebozond and the Pontus*, London 1980, chap. X, p. 196–198.

<sup>49</sup> M. Kuršanskis, *op. cit.*, p. 77. Despoina Khatun is not the name but the title.

Doubtless, the whole plan sprang from Venetian initiative. The envoys of Serenissima had been penetrating into other countries, Poland included, for quite some time then. Their accounts throw light on the message by Długosz.

The Venetian source implies that Uzun sent Zeno to Poland soon after his defeat in 1473<sup>50</sup>. Catherino Zeno's post at Hasan's court was soon taken by Josefata Barbero and Ambroggio Contarini<sup>51</sup>. They also had to traverse Poland and met Casimir in order to transmit message to him. Zeno claims that Polish and Hungarian ambassadors had been present at Hasan's court up to the moment of his defeat when he sent them back, because he did not want them to witness his humiliation in the war with Mehmed. The text suggests that they were accompanied by Catherino<sup>52</sup>. The identity of Polish ambassador at Hasan's court remains unknown. In the light of Zeno's account the Polish King was busy fighting the Hungarians. It is important that Venice realised the conflict. Ignoring the King's policy, Zeno stressed the potential Turkish threat on behalf of Uzun Hasan. „The King heard him graciously and replied that on the account of the war with Hungary, he could not fight against the Turks with whom he was in league”<sup>53</sup>. Thus Zeno emphasizes the main motive behind the embassy which was the threat of Mehmed's invasion, and this converges with Długosz. Still, Zeno never mentions any matrimonial plans. An assumption can be made however, that these plans could have been discussed in a separate letter which may or may not have been genuine.

In his account Zeno tells us that he persuaded the King to put an end to the war with Hungary and join the expedition against Mehmed. Even if the King promised to do so, which Długosz does not say, he never kept his word as he was soon to reopen hostilities against Hungary in Silesia<sup>54</sup>. When Zeno and other Venetians arrived at the King's court Długosz was not around, he was then accompanying Ladislav in Bohemia. The royal sons were taken care of by Philippe Buonacorsi, that is Callimachus, the Venetian<sup>55</sup>. Zeno says that while staying in Poland he actually met Paolo

<sup>50</sup> Catherino Zeno, *Travels in Persia*, in: *A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, trans. by Ch. Grey, undated, p. 1-69.

<sup>51</sup> *Travels to Tana and Persia by Josefata Barbero and Ambroggio Contarini*, trans. by W. Thomas and S. A. Roy, New York, undated. Polish translation of Contarini's text was done by J. U. Niemcewicz, *Podróż Ambrożego Kontaryniego przez Polskę do Persji 1474-1477*, in: *Skarbiec historii Polski*, ed. K. Sienkiewicz, vol. 1, Paris 1839, p. 1-15; and repeated by J. Gintel, *Cudzoziemcy o Polsce. Relacje i opinie*, vol. 1, Kraków 1971, p. 104-111. The historians, however, do not revert to it.

<sup>52</sup> Catherino Zeno, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 33-34.

<sup>54</sup> K. Baczkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 92. The truce between Poland and Hungary was signed in Stara Wieś on 21 February 1474 that is at the time of Venetian missions to Poland. Casimir started the war in the autumn of that year.

<sup>55</sup> M. Biskup, K. Górski, *op. cit.*, p. 126.



Omnibene, who is also mentioned in Długosz's chronicle. Zeno goes on to talk about his stay at Matthias Corvinus' court in Hungary<sup>56</sup>.

The whole account closely corresponds to Długosz's chronicle. Zeno certainly paid a visit to King Casimir openly encouraging him to start the war against Mehmed. Still, nothing is really said about the matrimonial offer. From Zeno's account it can be inferred that the actual initiative was taken up by Venice which suggested that Uzun Hasan had been in the foreground while Serenissima operated in the background.

Another Venetian envoy, Contarini, provides an excellent sequel to Zeno's message. Whereas, Barbero who had visited Poland earlier does not mention any negotiation with Casimir<sup>57</sup>. Contarini arrived in Poland in April 1474. He was received by the King in Łęczycza at Easter. The King gave him a black damask coat as a gift. Contarini in turn delivered his present and told the King his business<sup>58</sup>. What they spoke about remains unknown. It can only be assumed that the Venetian pressure on the King was kept up. Contarini's account testifies to a typical spying mission which focusses on the details of Polish geography. If this was the case we can raise the question about the content of Contarini's conversation with Callimachus whom he met in Lublin. Callimachus was staying there with the royal sons. Contarini tells us that it was the King who insisted on this encounter; he wanted Contarini to meet the young princes<sup>59</sup>. We cannot exclude the possibility that what took place was really a confidential talk of the secret agents. As I have said, Buonacorsi represented the Venetian *raison d'état* and was interested in Casimir's involvement in the war. Evidence for this can be found in his own text analyzed above. Obviously, Contarini does not mention the topic of his conversation with Callimachus and the royal sons. What is certainly known, is that he later went to Caffa where he had a clandestine meeting with Paolo Omnibene<sup>60</sup>. Everything seems to indicate that Poland and the neighbouring countries were explored by Venetian secret service.

Later on, Contarini set off to Uzun Hasan's court. On his way there he saw friar Lodovico, whom A. Bryer reveals as a fraud<sup>61</sup>. Lodovico had already been to Poland in 1465, when he presented himself as a patriarch of Antioch, which was completely false<sup>62</sup>. Contarini's encounter with Lodovico arouses doubts concerning the genuinity of Uzun Hasan's proposals. Thus, we may be faced with a next forgery, which was connected

<sup>56</sup> Catherino Zeno, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup> *Travels to Tana [...]* by Josefát Barbero..., p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> *Travels to Tana [...]* by Ambroggio Contarini..., p. 110.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 111.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 115.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 144. A. Bryer, *op. cit.*, p. 194–195.

<sup>62</sup> J. Długoss, *op. cit.*, p. 423–424. Cf., *Rozbiór krytyczny...*, p. 189.

with the Italian political circles. On his way back via Moscow Contarini was received by Casimir again in February 1476. Długosz never mentions it. Ambroggio Contarini informed the King about his visit to Uzun Hasan's court which he had apparently reached. The King listened to him for half an hour. As Contarini states, „the King said that he had heard with great interest about Uzun Hasan and the Tartars, and that he felt sure that what I said was true; and, he added that he never before met with anyone who had told him the truth”<sup>63</sup>. This would imply that Casimir was not completely uninterested in what Hasan had said, but the message is very mysterious and it is difficult to state whether it concerned the common action against Mehmed and if it still included the matrimonial offer. The King certainly cared for good relations with Venice. At least, this is what Contarini's account suggests on that point. Finishing his report, Contarini avers that his goal was not an elegant language but truthfulness. The basis for this is an analysis of his „Brief account on the dominions of Uzun Hasan”<sup>64</sup>. It looks like a typical report submitted by a spy. The report seems to suggest that Uzun Hasan, then 70 years old (he was 50 actually<sup>65</sup>) was involved in a civil conflict with his son by his Kurdish wife. Contarini claims that Uzun had only 50 thousand soldiers at his disposal and that he did not want to wage war with Mehmed. The earlier hostilities were only due to Karaman<sup>66</sup>.

This suggests that Uzun Hasan was only a pawn in the game played by Venice. It was Venice which created his public image showing him as the one who was eager to attack Mehmed. It was this image that reached the Polish court. Thus, the very existence of the matrimonial offer can be questioned. Still, it is impossible to explain the goal of Isaac of Trebizond's visit to Poland in 1475. Did he also play the role of the Venetian secret agent and that of Hasan's envoy?<sup>67</sup> There are too few available data to answer this question. And what about Casimir's interest in Uzun Hasan's court expressed by the King during his second meeting with Contarini in February 1476?

Whatever was the case, the King was not interested in joining the anti-Turkish project. What remains obvious, is the Venetian diplomatic initiative. It is plausible to assume that Venice may have gone to such

<sup>63</sup> *Travels to Tana [...] by Ambroggio Contarini...*, p. 167.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 172–173.

<sup>65</sup> M. Kuršanskis, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>66</sup> *Travels to Tana [...] by Ambroggio Contarini...*, p. 173.

<sup>67</sup> The amount of the soldiers mentioned by Isaac (three hundred) seems more probable than the milion from the letter brought by Zeno. Such numbers were common in the sources of those times. Thus Isaac may have acted on Hasan's behalf which does not exclude the possibility of him being used by the Venetian diplomacy.



lengths as to fake Hasan's letter which promised Byzantium to Poland. One more thing is clear; Venice was more than willing to attack Mehmed but as it realised Hasan's weakness it looked for a powerful ally, that is Poland. Whoever may have been the author of the fabulous promise concerning Byzantium and the marriage with Uzun Hasan's daughter, the Polish King turned a deaf ear to it. Only Długosz, who lamented the fall of Constantinople in 1453 could have been deluded by it<sup>68</sup>. Casimir was a very pragmatic ruler and never really responded to the supposed Uzun Hasan's project, promoted by Venice. The King can be best characterised by an anecdote. Once Casimir sent some gifts to his son Ladislas in Bohemia. They included hounds. All of that was seized by one of the Silesian princes who was hostile to the Jagiellon. Having learnt about it, the King said „Make him return the dogs! He can keep other things”<sup>69</sup>. Reality was important. Byzantium, too, was a gift but one from the world of legend whereas Casimir was a man of facts. This actually made him similar to Mehmed.

<sup>68</sup> J. Długosz, *op. cit.*, p. 142–145. Cf. M. Dąbrowska, *Cantacuzene – „The Wolf” or Matthias Strykowski's Recollection of Byzantium*, *Byzantinoslavica* 56(1995) 257–258.

<sup>69</sup> Miechowita, *Chronicon Regni Poloniae*, Kraków 1519, p. 326–327. After: M. Biskup, K. Górski, *op. cit.*, p. 341.