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**FROM THE LONG TURKISH WAR (1593-1606)
TO THE LIBERATION OF VIENNA (1683)**

Edited by
Alessandro Boccolini and Ovidiu Cristea



EASTERN EUROPEAN HISTORY REVIEW: LA RIVISTA

Il Comitato redazionale e scientifico è lieto di presentare al pubblico la rivista scientifica *Eastern European History Review*.

Con un carattere internazionale e interdisciplinare, una cadenza annuale e una fruibilità *open access* la rivista focalizza i propri interessi sulle dinamiche occorse nell'Europa Orientale durante tutta l'età moderna (XIV-XIX). *Eastern European History Review* è espressione del Centro Studi dell'Università della Tuscia CESPoM (Centro Studi sull'età dei Sobieski e della Polonia Moderna) nato nel 1997 per intuizione del Prof. Gaetano Platania, Direttore Emerito della Rivista.

L'iniziativa editoriale che presentiamo nasce dall'evidente mancanza in Italia di una rivista scientifica relativa alla storia dell'Europa centro-orientale in Età Moderna, nonostante la penisola abbia giocato un ruolo fondamentale per la Storia e la Cultura di una parte integrante del continente, a torto considerata come lontana e periferica.

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The Editorial and Scientific Board are proud delighted to present the *Eastern European History Review* under the aegis of Sette Città Editore.

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It publishes articles with significant approaches and original interpretations in all research fields concerning Central and Eastern Europe, with specific attention to the History sciences.

The editorial initiative we present comes from the obvious lack of a journal, in Italy, concerning the history of Central and Eastern Europe during the Modern Age, this despite its fundamental role in the history and culture of that part of the continent, wrongly considered distant and peripheral.

Quite the contrary is true, in fact. Main objective of the journal is to create a space for reflection and discussion on topics pertaining to Central and Eastern Europe, but also relations with Continental Europe, encouraging dialogue between scholars and experts in the field, and between different approaches of scientific research.

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CONFRONTATION ON THE TRANSYLVANIAN-OTTOMAN FRONTIER: THE BATTLES IN BANAT DURING THE “LONG TURKISH WAR”

ABSTRACT: In the Long War between Habsburgs and Ottomans (1593-1606), the Principality of Transylvania was also involved. In clashes between Transylvanians and Turks, the most important theatre of operations was the territory of present-day Banat. Conquered by the Ottomans following the military campaign of 1552, the lowland area of Banat (the Mureș valley, the area around Timișoara) remained a territory from which the Crescent troops could put pressure on the principality of Transylvania. This is why, during the Long War, the Christians constantly tried to recover these territories from the Ottomans. Although they had a number of notable successes (recapturing Lipova, for example), the Transylvanians failed twice in their attempt to conquer the centre of the eyalet, the town of Timișoara. The peace concluded in 1606 confirmed the new territorial configuration of the Ottoman-Transylvanian frontier, but the situation was temporary; all the territories conquered by the Christians during the Long War being recovered by the Ottomans in the following decades.

KEYWORDS: Long Turkish War; Banat; Frontier; Transylvania; Ottomans.

THE BACKGROUND

The Central European political scene experienced major shifts in the first half of the 16th century with the accession to the throne of the young Sultan Süleyman, the future Legislator (Kanuni). His offensive aimed to eliminate the possible Hungarian threat and gain control of the Middle Danube. The Ottoman-Hungarian conflict was settled on August 29, 1526 on the Mohács plain. The Hungarians lost their king, nobles, clergy and most of their army¹. The inevitable happened a little later. On August 29, 1541, by order of the Sultan, Central Hungary became an Ottoman vilayet with Buda at its center. The western and north-western parts of the former kingdom remained under the direct administration of the House of Austria and became known as Royal Hungary. The eastern part of the kingdom would evolve into the autonomous principality of Transylvania under the protection and suzerainty of the Sultan.

In what follows I will focus on some events of the late 16th century related to the territory now known as Banat, an area located in the south-western part of Romania and north-western Serbia. It is a space situated between the Mureș River to the north, the Tisa to the west, the Danube to the south and the Carpathian Mountains to the east, which until the middle of that century was part of the Hungarian kingdom.

¹ Ferenc Szakály, *A mohácsi csata* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979); Géza Perjés, *The fall of the medieval kingdom of Hungary: Mohács 1526 – Buda 1541* (Colorado: Boulder, 1989).

After the division of the kingdom, Ottoman pressure on this border area remained constant. The Habsburg attempts to control Transylvania had negative consequences for the territory between the Mures and the Danube. Following two military campaigns in the years 1551-1552, the towns of Timișoara and Lipova, together with a good part of the territories of the counties of Timiș, Arad, Cenad and Torontal were occupied by the Ottomans and turned into a vilayet. The eastern parts of the province, i.e. the cities of Caransebeș and Lugoj, together with the adjacent areas, were annexed to the new autonomous Principality of Transylvania, where they remained for more than 100 years, on condition of paying an annual tribute to the Ottomans. Although integrated into the Principality of Transylvania, this area was to retain the administrative organization specific to a frontier area. During the medieval Hungarian kingdom, the areas along the southern border were organized in the form of banates, and in the case of the territory between Mures and Danube, the banat of Severin was functioning. Emerging in the 13th century as a result of a Hungarian-Bulgarian conflict, this banat was in fact a frontier province which controlled the Danube border with Bulgaria, Serbia and later the Ottoman Empire. This administrative and military institution, which disappeared sometime after the Mohács disaster, was reactivated under the Banat of Caransebeș and Lugoj (nowadays in Romania), which superimposed the other existing administrative structures at regional level: the county of Severin and the district of Caransebeș². At the end of the 16th century, in the context of the conflict with the Ottoman Porte, some of the most important battles of the long war between the Christians and the Ottomans took place in this area.

THE "LONG TURKISH WAR" (1593-1606)

Begun as a frontier conflict in 1591, the war between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg monarchy would really begin in the summer of 1593 and would only end in 1606 with the Peace of Zsitvatörök. The main theater of operations was in present-day Hungary, but it involved to a large extent the Principality of Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia³. The boundary between the Ottoman-occupied territories of Banat, organized administratively in the form of the Timișoara vilayet, and the Principality of Transylvania fluctuated slightly during the 16th century, with both states having a fortified belt to ensure balance in this sensitive area⁴. Klára Hegyi estimates that before the conflict started, the Ottomans had about 4000-4500 soldiers in the garrisons of all fortresses in the Timișoara vilayet. After the outbreak of hostilities, the number of soldiers increased significantly, only in Timișoara in

2 Adrian Magina, and Livia Magina, "Banatul medieval", in *O istorie a Banatului. Compendiu*, eds. Ioan Bolovan, and Rudolf Graf (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2023), 198-200.

3 Tibor Szalontay, *The art of war during the Ottoman-Habsburg Long War (1593-1606) according to narrative sources*, PhD Thesis (University of Toronto, 2004).

4 Florin Nicolae Ardelean, "Political Boundaries and Territorial Identity in Early Modern Central Europe: The Western Frontier of Transylvania during the Sixteenth Century", *Territorial Identity and Development*, 6/1 (2021): 21-38

1596 a number of 1417 janissaries of the Porte were recorded⁵. Being in the border area, both the Christian and Ottoman territories in the Banat region were almost immediately the subject of disputes in the long conflict that began at the end of the 16th century. As early as February 1594, rumours began to circulate that Christian troops clashed with Turkish troops in the Danube and Vršac area (nowadays Serbia), and that the Transylvanian troops were victorious⁶.

Besides the dispute between the two states, there was also an expectation on the Christian population of these territories to be liberated from Ottoman rule. The almost permanent disputes between the Ottomans and the Christians on the frontier further affected the population of the area, who suffered from these minor skirmishes. Almost immediately after the outbreak of hostilities between the Habsburgs and the High Porte, the Christian population began to move against the Ottoman authorities in the territory of the Timișoara vilayet. The rebels, Serbs and Romanians, one of their leaders being Bishop Teodor of Vršac, attacked the Turkish troops with some success, their initiative being supported by the Principality of Transylvania through its officials in the Banat of Caransebeș and Lugoj⁷. Thus George Palatics, the ban (governor) of that region, and one of the instigators of the uprising, received instructions from the prince to help the rebels with gunpowder, ammunition, provisions and even soldiers⁸. In February and March 1594, the rebels attacked and conquered the fortress of Vršac, devastating the neighbouring villages⁹. According to 17th century information from Transylvanian Saxon background, in May the same year, troops led by Moses Székely took advantage of the uprising to attack the Ottoman garrisons of Făget (Timiș County, Romania), Lipova and Șiria (both in Arad County, Romania) with some success¹⁰. It is certain, however, that only the fortress of Făget was briefly occupied by the Transylvanian troops, and was

5 Klára Hegyi, *The Ottoman Military Organization in Hungary Fortresses, Fortress Garrisons and Finances* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2018), 169, 495.

6 Andrei Veress, *Documente privitoare la Istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării-Românești*, vol. IV (București: Cartea Românească, 1932), 68.

7 The most comprehensive overview of these events in: Cristina Feneșan, "Din premisele luptei antiotomane a Țărilor Române în vremea lui Mihai Viteazul. Mișcările populare din 1594 în eialetul Timișoara", *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Cluj-Napoca*, XXVII (1985-86): 99-136; see also: Radu Păiușan, and Corneliu Sav, "Lupta antiotomană din Banat și Mihai Viteazul", *Studii de Istorie a Banatului*, IX (1983): 29-42; Пера Николић, "Владика Теодор Несторовић", in М. Матицки, В. Јовић, eds. *Банат кроз векове* (Београд: Вукова задужбина, 2010), 123-31.

8 Florin Ardelean, "Contested Borderlands: war and territorial disputes between Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire (1594-1595)", *Eastern European History Review*, 5: *Central and South-Eastern Europe between the Christian and Ottoman worlds: conflicts, encounters and compromises (16th-18th centuries)*, ed. Canan Parmaksizoglu, (2022):34.

9 Feneșan, "Din premisele", 107.

10 Theodor Trâpcea, "Informații noi în legătură cu răscoala antiotomană din Banat", *Studii de Istorie a Banatului*, IX (1983): 23.

returned to the Ottomans as a gesture of goodwill¹¹. The brief military intervention of the troops of the Principality indicated that the Mureş valley was the area in which the Transylvanians were most interested in the conflict with the Ottomans. While these border clashes were taking place, the Prince of Transylvania sent his officials to negotiate with the leaders of the uprising. Thus, on June 13, 1594, Michael Vaida from Caransebeş secretly went to the rebel camp at Vrşac, where “the Christians all gathered here and swore before Veli Mironit Sava and the bishop and Michael Vaida that they all serve his Majesty faithfully and truly”¹². Reports sent to Venice towards the end of the same month indicated that Sigismund Báthory was preparing to besiege Lipova and attack Timișoara¹³. The prince’s intention did not materialize, and Transylvanian troops did not intervene directly to help the rebels. However, the insurgents managed twice to repel the Ottoman armies that had attacked the Becicherec town (Nagy Becskerek, today Zrenjanin, Serbia)¹⁴. The Habsburgs have sent a symbolic aid of 300 cavalymen and 100 arquebusiers, but the Transylvanian prince did not allow his troops to attack the Ottomans. The Turks had to devote some resources to removing the danger, and were detained for a while with the suppression of the revolt. Lacking a proper Christian military support, the insurgents were eventually defeated in July 1594¹⁵. After this moment the Turks put pressure on the border territories of the Principality, Ottoman troops led by Eucan (or Enean), the bey of Belgrade, crossed the Danube and attacked the area of the Almăj district (Caraş-Severin County, Romania) with the intention of taking the Transylvanians by surprise. The bey of Belgrade was unlucky, as the local population, taking advantage of their knowledge of the highland terrain of that area, attacked and massacred his troops, Eucan himself was killed, his head was sent to Alba-Iulia where it was hung above the city gate¹⁶. Following these

11 Ardelean, “Contested Borderlands”, 34-5.

12 Veress, *Documente*, IV, 78

13 Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor*, vol. III/2: 1576-1600 (Bucureşti: Socec, 1888), 42.

14 Feneşan, “Din premisele”, 112.

15 Feneşan, “Din premisele”, 120-21; Păiuşan and Sav, “Lupta antiotomană”, 31.

16 Szamosközy István *történeti maradványai 1566-1603* vol. II, ed. Sándor Szilágyi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1876), 189: “Enraged by the betrayal of the Transylvanians and the losses suffered, Eucan gathered a strong Ottoman army and crossed the Danube as secretly as he could. Then, in order to cause trouble for the Transylvanians, he headed for the region called Almăj, situated beyond Caransebeş, on the border between Transylvania and Wallachia. When this unexpected guest burst in and, spreading terror everywhere, began to plunder, a large crowd of peasants rose up to fight. Seeing that the fate of their homeland was at stake, they took up arms and, gathering in great numbers from various places, attacked the enemy. Trapped in the woods and surprised by unexpected traps, they slaughtered the enemy with heavy losses. There, Eucan lost both his army and his life. His head, white-bearded and bushy, was sent to Alba Iulia, to Prince Sigismund, where it was fixed to a stake at the Georgian Gate and left to decompose”. The event is also reported by the Saxon chronicler Mathias Miles in *Siebenbürgischer Würg-Engel* [...] (Hermanstadt: Fleischer, 1670), 169.

small-scale skirmishes, which were more local uprisings than military campaigns, the Principality of Transylvania decided to intervene directly in the conflict on the Christian side in the attempt to regain the territory lost to the Turks almost half a century earlier.

THE FIRST STAGE OF THE CONFLICT

In the long war for the Banat area, the confrontations between the Principality of Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire went through three phases. As early as April 1594¹⁷ and then in November the same year, new information began to surface that Prince Báthory had set out for Timișoara with an army of 40,000 good men¹⁸, but everything remained at the project stage. The first phase of the clashes began in fact in 1595, when the Transylvanians did their best to take as much territory as possible from the Ottomans, especially the areas in the Mureș valley and the area around Timișoara. Initially, it was the Ottomans who launched military operations in the Principality. On April 18, 1595, a detachment of 400 Turks attacked the town of Lugoj from Timișoara, but all except around 20 of them were captured or killed¹⁹. This attack can be included in a series of frontier raids, as the Ottoman forces were too small for strategic gain, but rather an attempt to plunder and put pressure on Christian territories. Shortly after this moment, the Transylvanian army took the initiative under the leadership of the Ban of Caransebeș and Lugoj, George Borbély. The Transylvanian troops began the offensive against the Ottomans by attacking the border fortifications between the Timișoara vilayet and the banat of Caransebeș-Lugoj. Setting out from Caransebeș on July 8, 1595, Borbély attacked the Ottoman fortification at Bocșa (Caraș-Severin County, Romania), which was bombarded with twenty-seven cannons, besieged, captured and the garrison slaughtered²⁰. On August 2, 1595, Father Alfonso Carrillo wrote to the General of the Jesuit Order, informing him that “it has been 16 days since the prince’s armies occupied two fortresses in the Timișoara area: one is Bocșa (Boxa) and the other Vrșac (Varsyz), both in the Timișoara district”²¹. Also in the mountainous area, not far from the Bocșa fortress, four more villages were recovered. After this first Christian success came the Ottoman response. Taking advantage of the fact that the Transylvanian officials were busy with the prince’s wedding (August 6, 1595), the Ottomans attacked and recaptured Bocșa and Vrșac, reaching Dobra and Ilia in the Mureș valley, which triggered the reaction of the Principality²².

57

17 Feneșan, “Din premisele”, 110.

18 Endre Veress, *Epistolae et Acta P. Alfonsii Carrillii S.J. 1591-1618* (hereinafter *Carrillo II*), vol. II (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1943), 129.

19 Veress, *Carrillo II*, 159.

20 Patriciu Drăgălina, *Din istoria Banatului Severin*, vol. II (Caransebeș, 1900), 47-48; Liviu Cîmpeanu, “‘Domnul fie lăudat [...], turcii au predat cetatea’: cucerirea Lipovei otomane de către transilvăneni, în 25 august 1595”, *Historia Urbana*, 26 (2018): 100.

21 Veress, *Carrillo II*, 185.

22 Cîmpeanu, “Domnul fie lăudat”, 102.

The same nobleman George Borbély was appointed at the command of the Transylvanian army, which joined the troops coming from the Saxon land and moved towards the fortification of Făget, with the aim of attacking Vărădia de Mureș (Arad County, Romania) and Lipova, both in the Mureș valley. After capturing the fortification of Făget on August 13, Borbély had to face the Ottoman attempt to retake it. Ahmed, the Pasha of Timișoara, set out for the fortress with an army of about 8000 soldiers. Christian and Ottoman troops faced each other in front of the fortification, which had just been conquered by the Transylvanians. The superior firepower of the Christians²³ and the bravery of the 'black' troops made up of Saxon riflemen contributed decisively to Borbély's victory. Immediately after the battle of Făget, he advanced along the Mureș valley and occupied the fortresses and towns of Eperjes and Chelmac (Arad County, Romania)²⁴.

The commander of the Transylvanian troops will proceed from here to Lipova. The Ottoman garrison of Lipova, the main urban center on the Mures valley, composed of about 350 soldiers surrendered after a siege of 5 days, on the evening of August 24, 1595 according to some information²⁵ or the next day according to others²⁶, being the most significant city regained by Christians. The news of the conquest of this urban center was transmitted on September 29 in Rome, to Claudio Acquaviva, general of the Jesuit order, being mentioned that the Pasha of Timișoara lost 8000 men, and along with Lipova Christians have recovered another 12 towns, hoping to recover the city of Ineu (Hung. Borosjenő, Arad County, Romania) which was besieged by the Transylvanian army²⁷. The impact of the conquest of Lipova was enormous, as the Ottoman garrisons of Șoimoș, Siria, Cenad, Felnac, Pâncota and Arad (Arad and Timiș Counties) abandoned these fortifications, which were immediately occupied by the Transylvanians²⁸.

As a consequence of the Transylvanian victories on the front in what is now Banat, the inhabitants of Lugoj and Caransebeș refused to pay the annual tribute of 2000 florins to the Ottomans²⁹. From June to October 1595, the Transylvanian troops managed to recover a good part of the territory lost to the Ottomans in 1552, and in November 1595, after a two-month siege, the fortress of Ineu was also occupied³⁰. The winter of 1595-1596 brought military operations to a halt, but both sides prepared for resuming hostilities.

These started again in February 1596 with the typical border skirmishes³¹. Thus, the

23 Ardelean, "Contested Borderlands", 38.

24 Veress, *Carrillo* II, 187; Cîmpeanu, "Domnul fie lăudat", 103-04.

25 Veress, *Carillo* II, 189.

26 Cîmpeanu, "Domnul fie lăudat", 105-06; Ardelean, "Contested Borderlands", 38.

27 Veress, *Carillo* II, 198-99.

28 Cîmpeanu, "Domnul fie lăudat", 107; Drăgălina, *Din istoria*, 48-50; Păiușan, Sav, "Lupta antiotomană", 31-2.

29 Drăgălina, *Din istoria*, 51.

30 Cîmpeanu, "Domnul fie lăudat", 107.

31 Florin Nicolae Ardelean, "The Siege of Timișoara from 1596 in the Works of

Christian garrison of Lipova had learned through spies that the Pasha of Timișoara was traveling from his town to Constantinople accompanied by his family, his wife, 75 carts full of slaves, 150 servants and ladies escorted by 300 soldiers. As a result of the attack the Pasha was killed and his wife was captured alive, the spoils captured were said to be worth 20,000 talers³². In the meantime, the Turkish troops had received reinforcements in the Timișoara vilayet, one source estimating it at about 50,000 men³³. The Ottoman counteroffensive began in April 1596 with the attack on Lipova, defended by the same ban Borbély and Captain Stephen Petki, who repelled two direct assaults on the urban center³⁴. News about this event reached Rome, indicating that no less than 25,000 Turks were besieging the town, with the Bey of Gyula wounded in the fighting and around 2,000 Ottomans killed³⁵. A group of 400 Janissaries was surprised by the Transylvanian garrison in Lipova and massacred on their way to Timișoara or Gyula, with only a few managing to escape³⁶. Another report from May 1596 mentioned that the prince had finally decided in the Diet to set out with troops to liberate Timișoara, with 18,000 cavalry and 12,000 infantries³⁷, a number rightly considered exaggerated by historians who have analysed the 1596 campaign³⁸. In all probability, as a report from June 1596 indicates, the prince had around 20,000 soldiers at his disposal with whom he prepared to attack Timișoara³⁹. The Transylvanian army led by Prince Sigismund Báthory first set out for Lipova, where alarming rumours were coming in that it was under siege by 40,000 Turks led by the Pasha of Timișoara⁴⁰. Arriving in front of Lipova at the end of May, the Transylvanian troops defeated the attackers, who were nowhere near the number indicated in the alarming reports⁴¹. Meanwhile, taking advantage of the fact that the Ottomans were busy at Lipova, 800 arquebusiers from Lugoj, together with a small number of cavalrymen attacked Timișoara, looted and burned part of the unfortified town, returning fully loaded with spoils⁴². After

Bernardino Beccari da Sacile”, in *Politics and society in Central and South-East Europe. Life under the shadow of the Ottoman Empire's Expansion (15th–16th centuries)*, ed. Zsuzsanna Kopeczny (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2021), 119.

- 32 Aurel Decei, “Avvisi riguardanti i Paesi Romeni negli anni 1596-1598”, in *Diplomatarium Italicum*, vol. IV (Roma: Libreria di Scienze e Lettere, 1939), 19-20; Veress, *Carillo II*, 228; Veress, *Documente*, V, 13.
- 33 Decei, “Avvisi”, 22.
- 34 Drăgălina, *Din istoria*, 52.
- 35 Decei, “Avvisi”, 33.
- 36 Decei, “Avvisi”, 27, 30.
- 37 Decei, “Avvisi”, 31.
- 38 Ardelean, “The Siege of Timișoara”, 120.
- 39 Decei, “Avvisi”, 34.
- 40 Decei, “Avvisi”, 31.
- 41 Ardelean, “The Siege of Timișoara”, 121.
- 42 Decei, “Avvisi”, 33-4.

several days of marching, on June 10, 1596, the Prince's army reached Timișoara, which it besieged for two weeks, until June 24⁴³, using 20 artillery pieces, of which 12 were 50-pounders and 8 30-pounders⁴⁴. Giovanni Marco Isolano recalled that the Christian troops had succeeded in conquering the town, being stopped in front of the well-fortified fortress, which was also naturally defended by the marshes of the Timiș river⁴⁵. The Transylvanian army probably occupied the suburbs inhabited by Christians (Palanca Mare and Palanca Mica), but failed to conquer the citadel. An attempt by 16,000 Tatars and 5,000 Ottomans to force the siege was repulsed with heavy losses for the attackers⁴⁶.

Timișoara successfully resisted the Christian attack, although Prince Sigismund Báthory personally led the siege against the urban center. The arrival in the Banat area of a new Ottoman army led by Giaffer Pasha, together with the lack of progress in the military operation, prompted the prince to lift the siege and move across the Mures River towards Lipova⁴⁷. The failure of the conquest of Timișoara was doubled by the alarming news reaching the Christian camp. For example, on September 7, it was rumoured that 40 thousand Turks had crossed the Danube and were marching towards Timișoara, and there was the fear that they would attack Lipova, Lugoj or some other town in the frontier area (*delli confini*)⁴⁸, but this did not happen.

Abandoning the siege of the main center of the vilayet, Sigismund would move on to make junction with the imperial troops led by Archduke Maximilian. The Christian armies met the Turks in the fall of 1596 at Mezőkeresztes, the largest and most important battle of the entire war. The battle fought between October 22 and October 26, although at first it seemed to be won by the Christians, turned into a defeat for the army of Archduke Maximilian and Prince Báthory⁴⁹. Despite the negative consequences of this battle between the Ottomans and the Christians, the outcome did not have any significant impact on the course of military events in the area between the Mures, Danube and Tisa.

The restoration within the Principality's boundaries of the areas seized from the Ottomans implied, on the one hand, the re-establishment of the Transylvanian administration and institutions, and on the other hand, the return of some noble estates to their former owners. In addition to the old owners, who were given back the estates lost almost half a century earlier, a number of new nobles, mainly involved in military operations, were rewarded. For their loyalty to the prince, these nobles, most of them from what is now Banat, were granted estates in the territory recaptured from the High Porte. The most important area reclaimed by

43 Ardelean, "The Siege of Timișoara", 122.

44 Decei, "Avvisi", 38.

45 *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, supliment III, eds. Ovidiu Cristea, Dana Caciur-Andreescu, et al. (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2023), 90.

46 Drăgălina, *Din istoria*, 52.

47 *Călători străini*, supliment III, 91.

48 Decei, "Avvisi", 44.

49 For the details on this fight: Sándor László Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború* (Szeged: Belvedere, 2000), 203-54.

the Christians was in the Mureş valley, around the towns of Lipova and Arad. In the years following the liberation from the Ottomans, the most numerous donations in favor of local nobles or nobles from other parts of Transylvania can be found in that particular region. Those who contributed to the military operations were especially recompensed, many of them Serbs who had settled permanently in the territory. On the occasion of these donations, officials of the county of Arad are mentioned (vice-captain of fortress of Arad, judge of the nobles) as well as numerous characters whose names seem to be of South Slavic origin. The donations for the South Slavic population were not limited to the Mureş valley, but also included areas in the former counties of Timiş or Severin. The territories regained from the Ottomans in Timiş county were mostly situated either between Lugoj and Timișoara, in the Buziaş area (Timiş County, Romania), or in the area delimiting the old medieval counties of Arad and Timiş. In some cases, the advance of the Transylvanian troops returned to Christian control settlements in the immediate vicinity of Timișoara (to the north and south of the city). Similarly to the Mureş valley, the first to benefit from the princely generosity in this area recovered from the Turks were the great noble families, who had been driven out decades earlier by the Ottoman conquest. Thus, Prince Sigismund Báthory gave the Bethlen family the Ictar estate (Timiş County), together with other villages and deserted places, which this family had owned before 1552. The situation is almost identical in the case of Stephen Zelemeri, to whom the prince recognized the property rights over Nădlac (Arad County), liberated from the Turks by the Transylvanian armies (*e manibus Turcicis esse eliberatam*)⁵⁰. Fighting the Turks was a good opportunity even for ordinary people to succeed and enjoyed the princely gratitude. This was the case of Gál Lázár, a foot rifleman, who participated in the battles of Bocşa, Vrşac, Făget, Lipova, Ineu and even in the siege of Timișoara, for which Prince Sigismund Báthory ennobled him on August 18, 1596⁵¹. The Transylvanian campaigns in the years 1595-1596 on the territory of the present day Banat were the most successful moment in the conflict with the Ottomans, liberating a territory of several hundred, perhaps even thousands of square kilometres.

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THE SECOND PHASE

A second important moment in the military operations in Banat in the context of the Long War took place between 1597-1598. Small-scale skirmishes occurred in April, when troops from Caransebeş, together with the Haiduks, attacked the Ottoman fortress of Moldava (today Moldova Nouă, Caraş-Severin County,

50 Adrian Magina, "Documente privind comitatul Timiş la finalul secolului al XVI-începutul secolului al XVII-lea", *Banatica*, 29/II (2019): 103-20.

51 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Vármegyei Levéltára, XV.24, no. 19: "Lazari Gáál Szeőnyi centurionis peditum nostrorum pixidariorum, quae ipse nobis et huic regno cum alias semper tum vero in ex pugnationibus Bokchia, Varsocz, Facziat, Lippa et Jeneő, fortalicionum ac proxima obsidione Themeswariensis fideliter exhibuit et impendit...ex statu et conditione plebea et ignobili in qua natus est...in coactam et numerum verorum regni Hungariae et Transylvaniae nobilium annumerandum, aggregandum, cooptandum et ascribendum".

Romania) for plunder, the Christians being ambushed by the local sanjak troops and forced to flee⁵². Some Ottoman and Transylvanian contacts took place in the summer of that year with a view to concluding a peaceful agreement. In June 1597, Sultan Mehmet III informed the beylerbey of Rumelia, the Pasha of Buda and the Pasha of Timișoara that the envoy of the Prince of Transylvania had arrived in Constantinople for negotiations. As a consequence, the high Ottoman officials were ordered to hold back from attacking the principality's territories during the negotiations. Apparently, the Sultan's order was not obeyed either by the Pashas of Timișoara or by the Pashas of Gyula, whose troops attacked and plundered Transylvania's frontier territories⁵³.

The actions of the Ottoman dignitaries were a *casus belli* for Sigismund Báthory, who initiated a new campaign to occupy Timișoara. Chancellor Stephen Jósika was appointed to lead the troops. We do not know what prompted the prince to appoint the chancellor to lead the army, perhaps the fact that he was originally from the Caransebeș area, his family having estates near the Ottoman border⁵⁴. Jósika's troops began their campaign in the fall of 1597 by attacking the Ottoman fortresses around Timișoara. A news of October 9, 1597 mentioned that the prince together with the captain of Lipova would besiege Timișoara in the hope of gaining something, after having occupied the fortresses of Felnac and Cenad, located 2 leagues from Lipova⁵⁵. Obviously, this was just one piece of news among many, the prince being far from the battlefield. The one who conquered Felnac, Arad and Cenad on October 9-11 was the same George Borbély⁵⁶, who had made a name for himself in previous years. Chancellor Jósika had around 25,000-28,000 soldiers at his disposal, with whom he attacked the town from October 17⁵⁷. On November 15 the news reached Rome that Timișoara would fall into Christian hands in a few days. A week later, on November 22, 1597, there was another piece of good news: the Transylvanians had breached the town of Timișoara, and although the fortress was holding out, there was hope that they would eventually occupy the citadel⁵⁸. The coming of the cold season and the presence of fresh Ottoman troops forced the Transylvanian army to retreat. The Ottoman reply came in the summer of 1598, when Suleiman, the beylerbey of Timișoara, launched an attack on Cenad, which had been conquered by the Transylvanians the previous year, using mainly troops from his vilayet, along with units from Belgrade and Smederevo. The siege began on June 19, and Suleiman

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52 *Avisi nouvi di Alba Giulia del primo di Maggio MDXCVII*, stampata in Roma e ristampata in Bologna presso gli Her. Di Gio Rossi, 1597.

53 Tamás Kruppa, "Okmányok és iratok a tizenöt éves háború időszakából (1594-1597)", *Levéltári Közlemények*, 76 (2005): 82-3.

54 Dragoș Lucian Țigău, "Familia nobililor Josika (Ioșica) în secolele XVI-XVII", *Banatica*, 18 (2008): 269-96.

55 Decei, "Avvisi", 62.

56 Endre Veress, *Epistolae et Acta P. Alfonsii Carrillii S.J. 1591-1618*, vol. I (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1906), 219-220; Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata*, 279.

57 Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata*, 279.

58 Decei, "Avvisi", 63.

tried to capture the fortress using his four cannons. Francisc Lugosi, the captain of the fortress, asked for help, which came from Captain George Király of Oradea. Suleiman Pasha abandoned the siege and retreated towards Timișoara, pillaging the area in retreat. Andrew Barcsai, the captain of Caransebeș and Lugoj set a trap for Suleiman Pasha, persuading him, with the help of some Ottoman deserters, to attack Lugoj, which had been presented as an easy target. On the evening of July 6, the beylerbey of Timișoara set out for the fortress of Lugoj with an elite army estimated to be between 900 and 2,000 men. After the Turks had crossed the Timiș river, the bridge was destroyed and 200 infantrymen were hidden near the suburbs, behind the Ottoman troops attacking the fortress. At dawn on July 7, Suleiman's troops storming the fortress fell into a trap: Barcsai attacked from the front and the infantry from the rear. Surprised and desperate, the Turks retreated in disorder towards the Timiș river, where many drowned. In the battle of Lugoj on July 7, the Ottomans suffered heavy losses, with 481 Turkish heads exposed on the walls of Lugoj fortress and 250 prisoners captured. In the meantime, the Ottoman commander-in-chief moved first to Belgrade, where he stayed for a while, then built a bridge at Pančevo (today in Serbia) and crossed the Danube. After crossing the river, the Ottoman army advanced towards Becicherec, where it halted to await the arrival of auxiliary troops. The Ottoman-Tatar forces taking part in this offensive were estimated at around 50,000-60,000 men, but two months had already passed and the time favorable for military campaigns had passed⁵⁹. This event marked the end of the second phase of military operations in what is now Banat region. However, if in the future the Voivode Michael the Brave might recapture the main fortresses, such as Timișoara, Gyula, Solnok and Cenad, from the hands of the enemies, these must be restored to the Habsburgs; in return, the smaller fortresses and places must be granted to the him and his successors as fiefs, as long they ask the confirmation from the Habsburgs⁶⁰.

In the years 1599-1602 there were no major battles on the Ottoman-Transylvanian front in Banat, only small-scale clashes, raids, raids on villages with a few dozen men. This is the time when the ruler Michael the Brave of Wallachia succeeded in politically and militarily controlling Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia.

THE LAST CAMPAIGNS

Following the death of Michael the Brave, the Banat area remained under the influence of the imperial general Giorgio Basta. At least formally, Caransebeș and Lugoj remained loyal to the Habsburgs. Basta's policy in Transylvania, however, displeased some nobles, including Moses Székely. Székely set himself up as a candidate for the princely throne, but in the face of Habsburg pressure he took refuge in Timișoara, seeking help from the Ottomans. Caransebeș and Lugoj were caught in the middle between the two parties. This was the beginning of the third stage of the clashes over the area between the Danube, Mures and Tisza, which was in fact Moses Székely's attempt to assert himself on the throne of the Principality.

59 Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata*, 293-294; Drăgălina, *Din istoria*, 63-5.

60 *Monumenta Comitialia regni Transilvaniae*, vol. IV, ed. Sándor Szilágyi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1878), 542.

On August 5, 1602 the vice-captain of Lipova, John More, wrote to Basta that: “a part of the Turkish army with two pasha and three beys encamped near Timișoara [...] Bektes pasha arrived again in Timișoara with all the armies with which he was stationed in Szolnok. The Tatars are also coming [...] about three hundred. We don’t know for sure what they want to try and what their intentions are”⁶¹. These Ottoman troops led by Bektaş Pasha attacked Lugoj, set it on fire and plundered the inhabitants, who in desperation sent requests for help to the imperial general Giorgio Basta⁶². He did not respond to the petitions, being more interested in the situation in the Mureș valley. On September 1, 1602, Basta wrote to Archduke Mathias that George Borbély with 3,000 Szeklers and 2,000 horsemen was going to Lipova to reinforce the castle of Șoimoș⁶³. In December of the same year, with 500-foot soldiers, 250 horsemen and 20 cannons, Bektaş attacked the Făget town, located on the route into Transylvania, which suffered the same fate as Lugoj⁶⁴. Even now the imperial general does not intervene in favor of the urban centers of the Banat of Caransebeș and Lugoj, being occupied in Hungary. Taking advantage of this fact, in March 1603 Moses Székely accompanied by Bektaş Pasha, with Ottoman, Tatar and Szekler troops set out for Caransebeș, which surrendered without a fight. From there, Székely’s army moved on to Lugoj, also occupied without a fight on April 11. The Transylvanian-Ottoman army, composed of about 10,000-12,000 soldiers according to Basta’s estimate⁶⁵ (Christians and Ottomans) then moved towards the Iron Gate (*Porta Ferrea*), entered Transylvania and occupied most of the country forcing General Basta to take refuge in the northern part of the Principality (in Satu-Mare). On July 17, 1603, near Brașov, Moses Székely suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Wallachian troops of the voivode Radu Șerban in which he lost his life⁶⁶. Immediately after this victory, on July 19, 1603, the emperor writes to Basta to recapture Transylvania and to act against the enemy with fire and sword, not to refrain from attacking the Turks by any means, namely to besiege Timișoara or Gyula⁶⁷. But first the territories in the Banat area of Caransebeș and Lugoj had to be recovered. On September 20, 1603, Basta issued letters of protection for the Caransebeș and Lugoj towns⁶⁸, and on November 7, 1603, he notified the officials there to surrender the fortresses and recognize the Serbian (in fact Croat) captain

61 Endre Veress, *Basta György hadvezér levelezése és iratai* (hereinafter *Basta II*), vol. II (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1913), 47.

62 Drăgălina, *Din istoria*, 89.

63 Veress, *Basta II*, 59.

64 Drăgălina, *Din istoria*, 89-90.

65 Veress, *Basta II*, 202.

66 Victor Motogna, “Războaiele lui Radu Șerban (1602-1611)”, *Analele Academiei Romane. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, Seria 3, tom 6 (1926-27): 263-73; Cristian Mareș, “Prima bătălie de la Brașov a lui Radu Șerban (17 iulie 1603)”, *Acta Terrae Fogarasiensis*, VII (2018): 111-21.

67 Veress, *Basta II*, 257.

68 Veress, *Basta II*, 306.

Simon Horváth (Lodi) as a ban⁶⁹. Three thousand Serbian (Razzieni) soldiers were stationed at Lipova and Lugoj to face possible Turkish attacks⁷⁰. These South Slavic mercenaries caused disturbances in Caransebeş and Lugoj, looting or even killing some of the citizens of the two towns, which triggered a violent reaction from the inhabitants, who, after a series of clashes, managed to drive them out of the area (1604-1605)⁷¹. This was the last stage of the conflict between the Christians and the Ottomans in the region between the Mureş, Danube and Tisa.

CONCLUSION

What can be observed with regard to the three stages of confrontation in the present-day area of Banat is that they represent probably by far the most serious military engagement of the Principality of Transylvania in the Long War. Although of local importance, the battles in present-day Banat mainly reflect the attempts of the Transylvanian princes to reclaim and preserve the Mures valley, a strategic route for the Principality. As for Timișoara, although the town itself could not be conquered, the Christians succeeded in imposing themselves to the west, south and north of the urban center by occupying settlements a few kilometers from the town gates, which were donated to different nobles in an effort to win their loyalty and involve them in the anti-Ottoman struggle. The first phase of the Transylvanian offensive was also the most successful, and after the battles of 1595-1596 the frontier with the Ottomans remained largely unchanged for about two decades. However, the Christian revival was short-lived, as the first territories lost to the Ottomans were those previously won in the Mures valley. In 1616 Lipova was recaptured by the Ottomans, and in 1658 the High Porte annexed Caransebeş and Lugoj with the surrounding areas, thus integrating the whole Banat into the Timișoara vilayet, where it remained until 1716.

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69 Veress, *Basta* II, 318.

70 Veress, *Basta* II, 325.

71 Drăgălina, *Din istoria*, 101-107; Dragoș Lucian Țigău, "Familia nobililor Fodor în secolele XVI-XVII", *Banatica*, 19 (2009): 86.

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