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CLUJ-NAPOCA  
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL: “HISTORY, CIVILISATION, CULTURE”**

**BRAŞOV  
AND THE PRINCIPALITY OF TRANSYLVANIA  
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OTTOMAN-HABSBURG  
RIVALRY (1526 - 1613)**

**SUMMARY OF THE PHD THESIS**

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**2013**

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**Keywords:** Braşov, frontier city, political pragmatism, regional autonomy, urban identity, transylvaniam, multiconfessional, ideological conflict.

## Summary

The political and ideological evolution of the city of Braşov represents an important part of the history of the Transylvanian Principality. The present paper presents the evolution of the city within a general context marked by the transformations of the Transylvanian province during the Austro-Ottoman conflicts. The chronological reference points are the battle of Mohács (1526) and the beginning of Gabriel Bethlen's reign (1613). Our main focus consists in emphasizing the particularities caused by the privileged status of the city and by the political crisis situations.

The research contains a series of levels of approach. The first stage consists of an analysis of the city's politics as compared to that of the Saxon University and the Transylvanian Principality. The second step implies the integration of the results into the wider field of international politics. At this point we underline the connections between Braşov and the near-by states (the Habsburg Monarchy, the Ottoman Empire, Walachia and Moldavia).

The history of Braşov is a major subject within the Transylvanian history due to its complex nature. The study brings to light interesting aspects by gliding from punctual and particular perspectives to global views and back again. Moreover, the flexibility of such an approach stands out from the temporal and ideological dynamism.

The current paper is divided into five major chapters, each assigned to one Transylvanian sovereign. The last chapter approaches the history of the Romanian suburb of Şchei, during the chosen timeline. This method allows an in-depth view of the political evolution, starting from general/stately aspects, down to particular/urban processes.

The first chapter: **From Ferdinand of Habsburg to John Zápolya. Braşov's policy between 1526 and 1540** contains the first stages of the territorial unification of Transylvania. Due to the dissolution of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary and to the lack of a strong central authority, the regional and local aspects stand out within a general centrifugal movement. Thus, the frontier city of Braşov chooses to side with Ferdinand of Habsburg, against John Zápolya. The reasons for such an option are complex, starting from the popular pan-Germanic ideology and leading up to the pragmatic motivation of the enormous tax debt accumulated by

the city. The main consequence of this action consists in the involvement of the entire Saxon University in the regal conflict, on Ferdinand's side.

During the fourth decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the city changes its options once more, by renouncing the imperial guardianship, which turned out to be detrimental. Thus, the city returns on King John's side. The relations with the Moldavian voivode Petru Rareș reveal the influence of the frontier position upon the city's political actions. Between 1527 and 1536, the voivode manages to impose a form of protectorate over the area of Țara Bârsei. This favors the Saxons in numerous instances. For example, Petru Rareș obtained the royal pardon of Brașov, from King John Zápolya, as well as a written confirmation of the ancient privileges of the city.

The political actions of Brașov, between 1526 and 1540, oscillate between two important figures: the Moldavian voivode, Petru Rareș and the captain of Făgăraș, Stephen Mailat. The great influence of the latter in the political proceedings of Brașov can be explained by the strategic position of his fortress. Făgăraș lies between Brașov and Sibiu, thus controlling the connection between these two crucial pillars of the Saxon nation. Both Mailat and Petru Rareș claimed the area of Brașov for themselves. In this situation, the city takes advantage of the tensions between the two leaders and manages to obtain important privileges from them.

The second segment, entitled **Brașov, between Reformation and Civil War (1541-1571)** contains observations about the consequences of the emergence of the Transylvanian Principality and its influence upon Brașov. Due to the impact of major European events, such as the continuing Austro-Ottoman conflicts and the expansion of the Lutheran Reformation, the Transylvanian city does not stand out as a political entity. However, Brașov has an enormous contribution to the events, by implementing and disseminating the Lutheran confession in Transylvania. This issue does not concern only the spiritual matters. On the contrary, by involving the religious and lay authority, the process underlines the close connection between confession and politics during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The geopolitical position of the city proves to be a crucial factor during this period. Regarding the internal affairs, Brașov continues to play its role as a diplomatic mediator between the Transylvanian authorities and those of the two neighboring Romanian principalities. From a regional and international perspective, the urban Magistrate follows the policy of the Saxon University. Before 1541, the Saxon cities got directly involved into the conflict for the Hungarian throne. After the fall of Buda, the Saxons resumed to promises of

support towards Ferdinand of Habsburg. However, they refuse to take any military or political risks.

The somewhat favorable policy of the Saxon cities towards the Habsburg dynasty changes after 1556. The imperial occupation from 1551-1556 caused a serious trauma by repeatedly violating the Saxon privileges, constant pillaging and the Austrian pro-Catholic resolutions. As a consequence, the entire Saxon nation swears allegiance to Queen Isabella and her son, John Sigismund Zápolya. Their religious tolerance attracted the Lutheran Saxons. They regarded these sovereigns as the only solution for the preservation of the religious freedom.

Braşov receives a series of particular rewards for its new political orientation. These included trading privileges and various types of incentives. Furthermore, Prince John Sigismund Zápolya offers a substantial financial support for the rebuilding of the city walls and fortifications.

In conclusion, between 1540 and 1571, Braşov subscribes to the general Saxon policy. Under the pragmatic leadership of Petrus Haller, the University acts as a unit. The reasons behind their allegiance to the central authority reside in the constant Ottoman threat and the general hostility towards the House of Austria (especially after 1556). Pragmatism becomes a general feature of the Saxons' position during this time. Thus, despite some initial negotiations with the Austrians, the cities rebuff any direct involvement in the civil war between John Sigismund Zápolya and Ferdinand of Habsburg. This option becomes obvious after the implementation of Lutheranism in the entire Saxon territory (1547- in the cities, 1551 - at a rural level).

The third chapter: **Religious Tolerance and Political Balance. The Evolution of Braşov during the Reign of Stephen Báthory (1571-1586)** analyzes a peaceful period in the city's history. Due to Stephen Báthory's religious tolerance, Transylvania is spared of religious wars. Thus, after almost 50 years of civil war, the Principality undergoes a period of peace. Braşov receives a special sort of protection from the Prince, especially after he defeats his rival, Gáspár Bekes.

In this context, the city consolidates its municipal laws and its institutional structures. Moreover, the entire Saxon nation succeeds in unifying the Transylvanian Lutheran doctrine and the Saxon Code of Law. The position of Braşov undergoes a series of changes as the components of the Saxon identity emerge. Thus, Lutheranism becomes a unifying aspect. As it expands into the Saxon land, it becomes part of the Saxon self-representation system, under the name of *religio Saxonica*. The other crucial element of this newly emerged identity is the

Saxon Code of Law. The compilation of the Saxon Laws and privileges into the *Eigen-Landrecht* offer a legal basis for the Saxon identity. The royal approval from 1583, confirms this fact.

The fourth chapter: **Between Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire. Braşov during the Fifteen Years War** describes a dynamic period from Braşov's history. The crucial events involving the Transylvanian Principality have a direct impact on the city. Often we find Braşov in the first line of action, especially during the military campaigns in the area. From an ideological point of view, the city grows into the representative of a legalist perspective. The urban Magistrate defends the legitimate Prince against usurpers and contenders. Concurrently, the city develops close connections to the near-by states of Walachia and Moldavia, especially after the uprising of Moses Székely. These efforts will have crucial consequences in the following years.

The 15 Years War (1591/1593-1606) finds Transylvania in the midst of an ideological confrontation between the local tradition of the Status' Monarchy and the Austrian-inspired authoritarian policy, characterized by a strongly centralized policy. Braşov shifts between the two sides. Thus, after 1599, the city supports the imperial representative, voivode Michael the Brave.

The perspective changes once the voivode begins to behave as the natural sovereign of Transylvania. The emerging tensions reveal the contrast between a legalist political perception (supported by the city of Braşov) and a Byzantine-oriental one, grounded on the legitimacy of the conquest by sword (strongly promoted by Michael the Brave).

Between September 1600 and August 1601, the University returns to a unified course of action, by choosing to acknowledge Sigismund Báthory as the legitimate ruler of Transylvania. However, this union is short-lived and the Saxon nation becomes divided once again. Braşov maintains its legalist position and continues to support Sigismund Báthory. Sibiu chooses to promote the interests of the House of Austria in Transylvania. The conflict between the two cities lasts until 1605, when Stephen Bocskai rises to the Transylvanian throne.

This segment of the paper also analyzes the development of the relations between Braşov and its neighbors. This period is similar to the one from 1527 to 1534, in the terms of the establishing of a Romanian protectorate in Țara Bârsei. With the support of the imperial general Giorgio Basta, the voivode of Walachia, Radu Şerban, manages to expand his influence over the south-western corner of Transylvania, in 1603. After a difficult start, Braşov succeeds in obtaining the Romanian voivode's friendship. As a consequence, the city

has a major contribution to the reconciliation between Radu Șerban and Prince Stephen Bocskai.

Oscillating between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, Brașov becomes an important factor within the military operations in the area. It is very important to note that the city has an autonomous policy only during the critical moments. Besides these exceptional situations, Brașov functions as a part of the Transylvanian Principality, obeying the sovereign and the Saxon University.

The fifth part: **Brașov after the Peace of Vienna. The Conflict with Gabriel Báthory** presents the study of a special situation. Due to the Prince's abusive policy, Brașov becomes the centre of resistance, gathering all the opponents against the sovereign. The city's efforts expand from the local alliances to international dimensions, by attracting the support of the Walachian voivode, Radu Șerban. Furthermore, the urban authorities also call upon the great powers: the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire. The exceptional circumstances are emphasized by the wide range of actors involved. Furthermore, the fact that one city, Brașov, manages to oppose an entire principality is a trademark of the political, ideological, confessional and identity changes.

The Saxon historiography presents the last three years of Gabriel Báthory's reign (1610-1613) as a succession of barbarian attacks against the *natio Saxonica*. However, the current research proves that there are a series of ideological and social aspects, which may contradict the perspective presented above. Thus, between 1610 and 1612, Transylvania witnesses another ideological confrontation of a similar nature to the one from 1602-1604. The city of Brașov represents the local legalist side and Prince Gabriel Báthory promotes the Western authoritarian policy.

The actions of Brașov from 1610 to 1612 prove the military, strategic and economic abilities of the city. Its independent policy is revealed in various forms: from negotiations with the Prince to diplomatic requests towards Poland, the Porte and the Holy Roman Empire. As far as internal issues go, the city initiates negotiations with Prince Gabriel Báthory and tries to convince him to respect the law. The initial requests consist in the conservation of the local urban privileges and the general ones, referring to the Saxon nation. As the civil war escalates, the requests concern the entire Principality. Led by Michael Weiss, the rebels from Brașov issue a series of programmatic documents stating the legitimacy of the Status' Regime in this multiconfessional country.

The first five chapters focus mainly on Saxon politics. However, we cannot neglect the considerable role of the Romanian community in Șcheii Brașovului. Thus, we included a sixth



part in our study: **Romanian perspectives in the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Șcheii Brașovului, between suburb and city.** The segment presents the mutual influences of the Romanian and Saxon communities as well as the emergence of a Romanian urban culture in Șchei.

This part of the study emphasizes the influence of the daily interaction between the Romanians and the Saxons residing in Brașov. Politically, Șchei is subordinated to Brașov. Despite their absence from the decision-making structures, the Romanians from Șchei play an important role in the diplomatic evolution of the city. They often serve the Magistrate as informers, translators or even spies. By fulfilling these tasks, the Romanians from Șchei become mediators between Brașov and the two Romanian principalities (Moldavia and Walachia).

Under the influence of the Saxon culture the inhabitants of Șchei developed an urban culture of their own, focusing on the use of the Romanian language. Their efforts are visible in the construction and development of the first Romanian school in Transylvania. Through this institution a new social class is born: the Romanian intellectuality. The members of this class produce, but also consume the new type of culture.

The Saxon influence upon the evolution of the cultural life in Șchei is undeniably great. However, the impact of the close relationship with the principalities of Moldavia and Walachia cannot be overlooked. Surpassing the political level, the voivodes contribute to the maintenance and development of the most important institution in Șchei: the church. This Romanian stronghold generates and protects the school and the print shop. All of them benefit from the support of important figures residing east and south of the Carpathian Mountains.

The Romanian protectorate over this small community creates a privileged environment. Șchei becomes an important part of the Saxon diplomatic network. Thus, the urban Magistrate offers special conditions to the Romanian suburb. They allow and even support the cultural development of the settlement, since the Romanians themselves served the city of Brașov well.

The present paper analyzes the political, ideological and identity aspects within the history of Brașov, during a controversial period of time. Initially, the city behaves as a part of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Nonetheless, as the Austro-Ottoman crises escalates, the urban Magistrate develops a particular political position, mostly independent from any centralizing authority, be it the Transylvanian sovereign or the Saxon University.

Thus, the study offers a complex approach to urban history. The horizon opened by the concept of the frontier city allows the evaluation of the political, ideological, social and

confessional factors within the evolution of the urban identity of Braşov. The consequences of this process can be observed in the political actions of the urban authorities.

Our study consists of a complex approach to urban history. The perspective of the frontier city allows the evaluation of the role of various aspects (political, ideological, social and confessional) within the evolution of the urban identity of Braşov. Furthermore, we emphasize the consequences of this process upon urban politics. The issues raised here are far from local. Notions such as living in a multiconfessional environment, multiethnic problems etc apply as much to contemporary time as they did to the pre-modern ones. Furthermore, this paper underlines the existence of a European political and cultural tradition in the city of Braşov.