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New Aspects of Town Defences in Early Modern
Transylvania

Defensive Structures, Guilds and the Duties of Town Guards

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

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Abstract

In my PhD thesis I have examined the defences of certain towns in pre-modern Transylvania from three different perspectives. These were the maintenance of fortifications (also related to the defensive role of guilds), the roles of town guardsmen (called *darabont* in Hungarian sources),¹ and the production and development of weapons in urban environment. Thus, the three major aspects of the research focus on the fortifications, the role of the human factor in defences and the use of firearms. In the course of my research, I have analysed the guild statutes containing the obligations for the maintenance of towers in the respective towns. At the same time, I was curious whether guild members were responsible for producing the weapons used for town defences and if not, where those came from. On the other hand, can we prove the continuity and activity of the independent, weapon producing guilds from the 15th century until the second half of the 17th century? The development of military technology (especially the rapid spread of firearms) raises new questions regarding the town defences. As part of the research, I have examined the technology of gunpowder production, and in the case of Cluj, analysed its quantitative data (processing the gunpowder accountings), examining whether the quantity produced locally was sufficient for the city's needs. In the case of the city guards, their origins and roles were examined. I was also curious to see to what extent the combat potential of the town guards was inferior to that of the red and blue guardsmen, who represented the elite infantry of the principality.

To answer the above detailed questions, a period of almost one hundred years was chosen, starting from the last decades of the 16th century until the death of Prince John Kemény (1662), taking into account the research history of the subject. Several subsections of my research are well-suited in current trends of the research field, continuing chronologically the work of Liviu Cîmpeanu, Florin Nicolae Ardelean, László Szokola and Szabolcs Kozák-Kígyóssy. Looking from a broader context, my research continues the work of Gernot Nussbächer, Paul Niedermaier and Zsuzsanna Cziráki. Defining the upper chronological limits of the research was a relatively

¹ *Trabant* or *Drabant* in German sources. In Romanian specialized literature the expressions of *trabant* or *darabant* are used.

straightforward task, as the era was "predetermined" by the internal war lasting between 1658 and 1662. The period is not only rich in sources of military history, but also brought with it a level of political changes and resource destruction that clearly demarcated and enclosed an era. Defining a lower chronological boundary proved to be a harder task. I had to examine primary sources dating back to the 14th-15th centuries, in search of details related to the town defences in guild statutes, which became the customary law for later centuries. At the same time, I also had to examine sources from the internal war that lasted until the 1540s, because the Diploma Andreanum, the great charter of privileges that defined the military obligations of the Transylvanian Saxons to provide soldiers for the king's army only laid down general conditions, and the relevant customary law changed considerably between 1540 and 1570.

After the chronological dating, it is essential to define the spatial framework of the research. Since it would have been impossible to review the defences of all the major towns of the Principality, the research was restricted to examining the sources of three towns, chosen according to well-defined criteria. Among these, we must highlight the defensive importance of each town in relation to its geographical position and/or economic potential; the number of guilds found in each town; and finally, the differences in legal status and in military customs and training of the towns. I also had to take into consideration each town's amount of available primary/archival sources. Thus, the town of Sighișoara was chosen instead of Sibiu, due to there being an unprocessable amount of sources in the former seat town of the Saxon University. Taking into consideration the aspects mentioned above, I have focused on presenting the defences of Brașov and Sighișoara, towns with a predominantly Saxon population in the period, and Cluj, a city with mixed Hungarian and Saxon population. In terms of legal status, Brașov was the administrative centre of a region (Țara Bârsei), Sighișoara was the seat town of a Saxon seat, while Cluj was a royal free city situated on the territory of a county. Thus, examining the sources of three towns with different legal status, we have increased the chances of varied results of the comparative analysis method. After processing the sources, the results were compared with data from Sibiu, used for defining analogies. In the case of Brașov and Cluj, we have presented the defences of the cities somewhat separately from their region, while for Sighișoara a different method of analysis was chosen. Since we were able to adequately present the defences of the Seat of Sighișoara in the 17th century, it would have been a mistake to take out the town of Sighișoara from the context. Due to this reason, the military role of the town was detailed as part of the territory of the Seven Saxon Seats in the

thesis, with using a considerable amount of primary sources from Sibiu, and often reflecting on the problems that affected both towns.

The main group of primary sources analysed in the thesis were the accounting books of the towns, various inventories, military regulations and resolutions, guild documents, military correspondence, "books of arms", and Turkish defters. In addition to using archival and published primary sources, I have placed great emphasis on discussing information from narrative sources, attempting to reflect on them in light of contemporary research findings. In the course of processing the sources, I have organized the extracted data into tables. The method was necessary in the case of guild sources, as I have attempted to standardize the denominations of certain associations, on the other hand to separate certain guilds from others as precisely as possible. Since a detailed discussion of the event history of the studied towns was not the objective of the thesis, only events that can be considered significant from the point of view of town defences were detailed. Thus, the pre-modern era of Braşov, Sighișoara, Sibiu and Cluj was presented in the form of a military history overview.

The first major chapter of the thesis focuses on the construction, development, deterioration and repair works of the town fortifications and also presents the current state of the remaining parts of those. It should be mentioned, that a detailed study of the art history of the fortifications was not included in the objectives of the thesis. After detailing the development of late medieval and pre-modern defensive systems and the spread of Italian-type bastioned fortifications, using my own research results and previous findings in the field, the fortifications of Brasov, Cluj-Napoca, Sighisoara and, to some extent, Sibiu were presented. In addition, as a separate case study, the defensive constructions of the fortress of Alba Iulia were also presented. A sub-chapter was dedicated to the repair works of the damaged fortifications of Cluj, which were presented with the help of data obtained from the processing of the accounting books. It can be clearly stated, that beside the members of the guilds who have maintained the fortifications, the citizens of the district also played an important role as labourers in the repair works, plus the town has also used the guardsmen as physical labourers during the renovations. An integral part of the chapter consisted the processing and analysis of the military correspondence of the town council of Sighișoara from two periods: 1601-1604 and 1644-45. Apart from the town's correspondence with general Giorgio Basta, the documents are unpublished. I have chosen to present the letters grouped into three categories based on the identity of the sender. The categories

being: the correspondence between the prince or the generals of the Transylvanian army with the town, correspondence between Giorgio Basta and the council of Sighișoara, and the correspondence between Sighișoara and other towns authorities. The letters provide valuable information, among other things, on the general image of controversial military commanders István Csáky and Giorgia Basta. The letters also provide new information regarding the rule of Sigismund Báthory, considered by historians to be one of the most indecisive princes, and about the overall picture of princely politics dominated by Transylvanian nobles. On the other hand, the correspondence adequately illustrates the heavy financial burden of the Saxon towns during the Long Turkish War and the logistical difficulties of military organisation in the Seat of Sighișoara.

The remaining subtopics of the research were divided into three major chapters: guilds and their defensive roles; the armies of the era; and the weapons used in the early modern period. The chapter dedicated to the defensive role of guilds is the continuation of my research from my master's dissertation defended in 2017, complemented with the results of the research from the project called "Erdélyi Céhes Adattár" of which I was member in 2018-2019. In the thesis I have made an attempt to present the guild system of the period in a unified way, according to the types of raw materials processed by the craftsmen in each town. Briefly quantifying the results, it was possible to prove the activity of 16-16 medieval guilds and twice as many (30 and 32) early modern period guilds in Brasov and Sibiu. For Cluj Napoca we can consider 22 guilds for the medieval era and the number increased to 30 by the early modern period. Finally in Sighisoara the sources attest three guilds before 1541, while in the early modern period there are sources for 10 guilds and 11 other crafts. The precise identification of several craft associations was made difficult by the significant differences in their denominations both in their contemporary, different language sources, and in 20th-21st century literature. In the first three sub-chapters regarding the guilds, I have discussed the organisation of urban defences in Europe before the spread of guilds; the spread of craft associations across the continent; and the development of the guild-system in the Kingdom of Hungary and Transylvania. In the following sub-chapters, with the help of archival sources the history of the guilds were presented in Brașov and Țara Bârsei, the territory of the Seven Saxon Seats, and Cluj respectively. Regarding the disputed status of weapon producing guilds of the period, we have not found sources that attest to the functioning of the guilds of firearms or crossbow manufacturers detailed in the publications of Ioan Marian Țiplic. In certain cases, the activity firearm crafters can be traced in the sources, but their guild membership is highly

questionable. My research is more in line with the more recent findings of Szabolcs Kozák-Kígyóssy and Liviu Cîmpeanu than with Țiplic's results. It can be concluded that several guilds of bow and arrow makers were already active in the territory of the Seven Saxon Seats at the end of the 14th century. Practitioners of this craft played an important role in Braşov and Cluj until the mid-16th century. However, the rapid spread of firearms (as was in the case of the guild from Sibiu) soon made their profession irrelevant, the guilds ceased to exist, and the masters became members of other guilds. Shield-makers had guilds in all three of the towns, but their products did also lose relevance in the second half of the 16th century. Following the process, the masters specialised in painting wooden objects and crafting spears, which were also produced by the carpenters' guild in Braşov. The activity of the armourers/sword smiths guild From Sibiu can only be traced for a brief period at the end of the 16th century. Although firearm making craftsmen and armourers were present in the major Transylvanian towns in the researched period, the production was probably not carried out by the guilds, but in the arsenals of the towns and in the larger cannon foundries. An independent guild of gunsmiths was formed in Sibiu just in the second half of the 18th century, after the masters have split from the locksmiths' guild. The documents relating to the founding of the guild have so far been unknown to researchers, and are a novelty of the thesis.

As part of the research, I have also examined several inventories of weapons stored in the towers maintained by guilds. The most important being: complete inventories from Braşov (1475, 1562), a complete one from Sighisoara dating to 1680-81, a partial inventory of the towers of Cluj (1603), and complete ones from Sibiu (1492-93, 1575 or 1681). Although I have not been able to find inventories completely unknown to previous research, the 1681 weapons list from Sibiu has not yet been properly analysed, only a simple publication of the text in German is known from the early 20th century. The analysis of the inventory has offered many pleasant surprises: both in terms of volume and richness of detail, it preserved twice as many information compared to earlier, surviving inventories. As a conclusion regarding the lists, while up to the middle of the 16th century we can read of a mixture of firearms and blank weapons from the inventories, at the beginning of the 17th century only firearms were stored in the towers, and by the end of the century arquebuses, which had been widely used before, were partly replaced by muskets, but the inventories again included (in greater numbers) blank weapons. It should also be noted, that in the 16th century we find not only infantry and defence weapons in individual towers, but also light cavalry weapons. This may suggest that before the spread of more effective firearms, defenders of towns were also

engaging in open combat with the attackers. In addition, the possibility has been raised that certain weapons owned by guild members may not have been stored in the towers, which could cloud the overall picture of the research. We can also trace the decline in the role of the guilds through the weapon inventories of the towers they have maintained. Certain (once important) craft associations "lost their tower" as the relevance of their products declined, and they were required to maintain another segment of the fortifications, together with members of another guild.

Regarding the very few surviving defence regulations of the guilds, I have to accept Annamária Jeney-Tóth's hypothesis. According to her, the texts of the regulations were so well known, that were written down only in cases when significant changes have been applied. From the surviving regulations we can see, that in cases of emergency the most important guilds generally contributed with 8-10 members to the defence of town, the number decreasing in proportion to the capacity and number of members of the smaller guilds. As the available sources are incomplete and reflect only periodic realities, we cannot accurately track the economic (and urban) expansion of individual guilds, but they shed light on more general trends.

The third major chapter of the thesis focuses on the armies of the pre-modern period. In parallel with presenting the armies of the principality, I have discussed the military of the two great neighbouring powers: the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire. A sub-chapter was devoted to the types of military units, with a more detailed presentation of the artillery and the development of firearms. The important military operations that determined the daily life of the principality were also discussed in this chapter, such as the failed Polish campaign of 1657, the sieges of Oradea between 1658-60, the siege of Sibiu in 1659-1660 and the battle of Seleuş that brought the defeat and death of prince John Kemény. In parallel with discussing the real size of the armies (often exaggerated in the sources), I have made an attempt to problematize the real military potential of the soldiers. The narrative sources of the period often denigrate the Transylvanian armies of the 16th-17th centuries, making dispraising statements about their equipment, to which the soldiers' lack of training is also added. In the case of the guardsmen, I was curious to see to what extent can we refute or possibly confirm this theory.

In the sub-chapter dedicated to the town guardsmen (called *darabont/drabant/Trabant* or *Fussoldat* in the sources), I have attempted to present their everyday life and roles in the town and also during the periods when the guardsmen were recruited in the armies of the principality. For the mentioned task, I have processed several primary sources from Sighișoara and Brașov, and the

complete accountings of the guardsmen from Cluj (a total of 17 surviving from the 1614–1654 period). In this context we need to differentiate the ordinary guardsmen from the elite red and blue *Darabont* units of the prince's court of Alba Iulia, which were established during the rule of prince Stephen Báthory and also joined his armies in Poland. The ordinary guardsmen were hired by the local authorities for a longer period of time, and were paid monthly in this period. Usually 20–30 guardsmen (slightly more on the case of Braşov) stationed on the gate towers of the towns. During times of war the guardsmen were also recruited in the armies of the Principality, being joined by other mercenaries forming units of 10 soldiers. From Cluj and Sighişoara usually 4–8 units were recruited for the army, this number being often over 150 guardsmen and mercenaries in the case of Braşov. The primary weapon of the guardsmen and Saxon mercenaries was the arquebus, with the equipment and gunpowder being supplied to the units by the respective town magistrate even in the armies of the principality. The Saxon mercenaries most probably served as auxiliary units beside the elite *darabont* infantry and cavalry. In the chapter I have also discussed the origins of the soldiers enlisted in the armies of the prince by the Saxon towns. More precisely on the proportions of constantly paid town guardsmen and newly hired mercenaries in the units mentioned above.

Regarding the military obligations of the Saxons, the resolutions of the well known charta called Diploma Andreanum (which dates back to 1224) theoretically remained unchanged during the 16th century, however our sources show a different reality. Instead of the 500 mercenaries needed to be armed (as mentioned in charta) by the Saxons in case of war, they were often ordered to provide 3 or 4 times more soldiers for the needs of the prince, even though the towns were unable to arm and hire such a big number of mercenaries. The questionable numbers were examined by researchers (Florin Ardelean, László Szokola, Liviu Cîmpeanu) during recent years, and I have continued their work for the 17th century. It can be concluded for the later century, that the customary law became at least the double number of the original 500, and it decreased to less than 700 only during Gabriel Bethlen's rule.

In the last major chapter of the thesis, I have presented the development of military technology and weapons used in the researched era, focusing on the development and spread of firearms. In a separate subchapter I have presented the accountings of the gunpowder mill from Cluj (a total of 30 accountings) from the 1592–1658 period, the source being processed by myself. The gunpowder needed for firing the arquebuses of the mercenaries was supplied by the

perceptors of the city, whose duty was to monitor the gunpowder production of the gunpowder mill of Cluj and to supply the powder to all of those who needed it for either military or personal use. Through the 30 surviving accounts we can trace the events in Cluj, some of which are also supported by changes in gunpowder storage. The changes in storage in the 1630s, which can be described as significant in comparison to earlier practices (gunpowder being more evenly distributed in the towers), are a clear reference to events such as the explosion of the Tailors' Tower in 1627, from which the city authorities drew their own lessons. The amount of gunpowder stored in the towers may be an indication of the strategic importance of the tower in question, which also shows the economic potential of the guild that maintained the tower. The appearance of the names of the gunpowder collectors in other Cluj sources may help to investigate social stratification and local administration. From a historical-economic point of view, the data recorded in the accounts of the gunpowder mill, in particular the descriptions of the two partial reconstructions of the mill and gunpowder mill in 1626 and 1655, provide invaluable information. I have also compared the exact quantities of sulphur and saltpetre needed to produce gunpowder with the imports of goods in the vigesimal and trigesimal customs records to clarify if the merchant routes used for weapons and prime materials used for weapon and gunpowder crafting were the same as the other major trading routes of the period. In the end I was able to confirm the hypothesis.

While some of the research questions initially asked were answered, a number of new questions emerged. The dissertation has succeeded in reviewing the military situation and early modern military history of the three cities, confirming claims from previous research that the city authorities did not generally seek to defend themselves against sieges from external enemies for long periods. However, this was a different reality during the turbulent period of internal warfare, as the siege of Sibiu in 1659-1660 demonstrates. In general, the citizens tried to avoid military service through their financial means and most often hired foreign mercenaries for longer periods of time to defend their cities. An important question is whether the line of thought built up from processing the sources from Brasov, Sibiu, Sighisoara and Cluj can be used as a "skeleton" and extended to the whole of Transylvania, or at least to the other Saxon towns. Can we even speak of "general urban defences in Transylvania", or are the local specificities too different for that? Thanks to the new results found through sourcing, I found the motivation to continue and expand the work in the future. Of course, there are many other directions in which the research can be continued. The vast amount of guild sources in the Transylvanian archives guarantees that some

guild or account documents and registers will certainly still contain provisions on the defences of the town or inventories of weapons. In the case of accounting books, unprocessed sources from Braşov and Sibiu more certainly contain new data. For further research, a more comprehensive study of the 17th century accountings of Sibiu is needed. For a more comprehensive study of town guardsmen, the use of data from Târgu Mureş found by Árpád Botond György and those from Baia Mare researched by Zsolt Sütő would be necessary. Future research should examine whether the surviving sources from Bistriţa, Mediaş or other smaller Saxon towns can be used to justify the conclusions drawn in the thesis for the whole region of the Seven Seats and the districts of Braşov and Bistriţa.