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http://hdl.handle.net/2067/49289

NOVITATES DE TURCIS SCRIBIT: SPIES AND NEWS ABOUT OTTOMANS ON BORDERS OF TRANSYLVANIA AND SOUTHERN PARTS UP TO 1526[1]

ABSTRACT
The issue of news about Ottomans in Transylvanian territories was not subject of Romanian or Hungarian scholars' debate. The Turkish threat was permanent and became "intimate" at the southern borders of the Hungarian kingdom in the 15th and 16th centuries. As part of the kingdom, Transylvanians were directly involved in fighting the Ottomans, but also in a huge network of spies and news about the Crescent. The proximity and the close connections with Wallachia and Moldavia of the Saxon towns in the south Transylvania, allowed them to inform the Transylvanian or even Hungarian central authorities about Ottomans. A lot of news described troop movements, its number or possible invasions in different parts of the Hungarian Kingdom. In reality, most of this news was just rumors', but produced fear and the feeling of insecurity for both officials and ordinary people.

KEYWORDS: Spies; News; Ottoman borders; 15-16th century; Transylvania.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the news about the Ottomans is not new, but the question has not been analysed as it should have been. I have chosen to focus on documents describing the southern parts of the Hungarian Kingdom and Transylvania. I'm not targeting matters of diplomacy and official war news, but those small matters that were transported by the scouts through a network developed over time between the main border towns. The chronological upper limit is the mid-16th century, due to the fact that the area south of the Mureș Valley was conquered by the Crescent troops in 1552, and Transylvania itself became an area of contact with the Ottoman Empire. The system of fortresses in the border area played a special role during military campaigns, the main obligation being to defend the territory and control the access routes. The network of fortresses was doubled by a clever network of scouts who were able to gather vital information on the state of the enemy armies by knowing the places, the people and not least the spoken language, let alone the written one. Documents containing important data on the activity of the scouts and spies in the Turkish territories can be found mainly in the account books of the

1 This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2019-0457, within PNCDI III, *From Medieval Frontiers to Early Modern Borders. The Military organization of the Western Parts of the Transylvanian Principality in the XVI-XVII centuries.*

Saxon towns from southern Transylvania. Thus, most of the information used in this material comes from the Sibiu Accounts, because it indicates the name of the scout/spy, the money received and where the mission took place.
The details of the news regarding the Turkish army's movement were "locked" in the memory of the scout, being expressed only in the presence of the recipient. The information came with the merchants and went with the shepherds, returned with the trusted men of the nobles fearful of the imminence of some new raids. In the documents, the rumours are often referred to as *novitates*.
The Turkish threat was permanent and became "intimate" on the southern borders from the end of the 14th century, and was highly visible at the end of the next century and the beginning of the 16th. Many news reports described troop movements, their numbers or possible invasions directions in different parts of the Kingdom. In reality, most of this news has only remained at the level of rumours, but it has nevertheless caused fear and fuelled a sense of insecurity for both officials and ordinary people.

Ovidiu Cristea[2] is the only Romanian historian to have analysed the impact of this news in Romanian Principalities and how it affected the undertaking of new campaigns, but his research is focused on Wallachia and Moldavia with very little reference to the situation in Hungary and Transylvania. In Hungary, in the early 20th century Sándor Tokáts` briefly analysed the confusing world of scouts during the Turkish conquest[3]. In the last decade, Hungarian historiography has also produced some valuable contributions to the spy movement and war news with a special focus on the 17th century[4].
In the 15-16th centuries, the communication of news developed differently, but the danger of news that was if not false, at least alarming enough to start a hasty military campaign that could adversely affect the country was known. In the 16th century, the Transylvanian Assembly stipulates on several occasions the need to pay these scouts, and recognises their role and importance, but warns at the same time of the possible risks of spreading false news[5]. Access to information

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2 Ovidiu Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor. Stiri şi război în sec. XV-XVI* (Târgovişte: Cetatea de Scaun, 2014).

3 Sándor Tokáts, "A kalauzok és a kémek a török világban", in *Rajzok a török világból*, vol. II (Budapest: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Kiadása, 1915).

4 Géza Pálfy, "Hírszerzés és hírközlés a törökkori Magyarországon", *Studia Agriensia,* 20 (1999): 33-63; Gábor Ágoston, "Információszerzés és kémkedés az Oszmán birodalomban a 15-17. században", *Studia Agriensia,* 20 (1999): 125-153; János Szabados, "Habsburg-Ottoman Communication in the Mid-17th Century. The Death of Imperial Courier Johann Dietz. A Case Study", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları/The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 54 (2019): 119-40.

5 Sándor Szilágy, ed., *Monumenta Comitialia Regni Transilvania*, vol. VIII (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1882), 437: «Supplicant tamen iidem Domini Regnicolae Maiestate Suae, ut sua Maiestas dignetur mandare Domino Waywodae ut sua Dominatio exploratores necessarios, pro agendis explorationibus tenere curaret, quo, iuxta reportatam explorationem, opus exigeret particulariter, ubi vero necessitas major cognosceretur generaliter ab omnibus insurrection fieri, ne ob frequentem generalem ad quoscunque leues

was not easy, transmission channels were not so wide and only a small number of people had access to it. The major threat to Transylvania and the entire Hungarian Kingdom was the Ottoman Empire, so the territorial advance towards the Danube after the conquest of the Balkan Peninsula in the second half of the 14th century left little space, physically and mentally, between the official borders of the Kingdom of Hungary and the powerful Ottoman Empire. This was the beginning of fear: the pagans conquering the entire Christian world, taking children, raping women, killing and disembowelling, burning and stealing [...]. If someone was unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of Turks (*in manibus Turcorum*) had his fate sealed[6]. Moreover, the image of the Ottomans in the Kingdom of Hungary, most often regarded as *sevissimi Turcorum*, has been a subject of debate in the scientific world since the 19th century.[7]

At the end of the 14th century, Sultan Bayezid changed his policy and tried to fight on two fronts, one in the Anatolian region and the other in Eastern Europe. Only the disaster represented by the battle of Ankara followed by the internal struggle between Bayezid's sons gave a respite to the states of Central and Eastern Europe. The Ottoman return marked a new cohabitation with fear and a new exposure to raids by Turkish troops. The entire 15th century is marked by numerous campaigns on the Danube. The leader of the anti-Ottoman struggle was at first John Hunyadi, a knight of Romanian origin from Transylvania and later governor of the Hungarian kingdom. In 1438 and later in the spring of 1442 the Ottomans attacked Transylvania. In the second attack from 1442, Mezid bey of Vidin divided his army in two: one column went towards Alba-Iulia, along the Mureș valley, and the other towards Sibiu. The Hungarian-Wallachian army won the battle against the invaders, but the Ottoman army managed to penetrate into the interior of Transylvania, spreading fear and terror among the inhabitants of the villages between Alba-Iulia and Sibiu[8]. In such uncertain times and changing geo-political conditions, it is easy to understand the existence of espionage, closely linked especially to the border area. For Transylvania and the southern parts of the kingdom, I think we can talk about strategic espionage, well organized and even well paid. The first news (*novitates*) about the Ottoman threat in Hungary comes from the end of the 14th century, with the beginning of the Turkish raids on the territory of the Kingdom. It was only in the second half of the 15th century that news became articulated in the era of John Hunyadi. He was directly interested in information about his enemies,

rumores, insurrectionem Regnicolae grauentur, et rebus eorum familiaribus per hoc detrimenta subire compellantur».

6 Adrian Magina, "In the hands of the turks. Captives from Southern Hungary in the Ottoman Empire (14-16th centuries)", in *State and society in the Balkans before and after establishment of Ottoman rule*", eds. Srđan Rudić and Selim Aslantaș (Belgrade: Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, 2017), 65-78

7 Gábor Ágoston, "The image of the Ottomans in Hungarian historiography", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungarie,* 61/1-2 (2008): 15-26.

8 Liviu Câmpeanu, "Magnificus Johannes de Hunyad, Wayuoda Transylvanus, validam potentian sevissimos turcorum Debelasset, Triumphum Victorie Reportando", *Transilvania*, 4 (2019): 86-96.

and the most reliable sources were from the areas close to the border line, namely Transylvania and the southern parts (*partes inferiores*, nowadays the territory of Banat). The two important cities in southern Transylvania, Sibiu and Brasov, had multiple connections with Wallachia, Moldavia and the territory south of the Danube thanks to the trade relations developed between these areas.
In the context of the permanent threat from the south, in July 1449 John Hunyadi asked the magistrate of Brașov to send him news about the Turks[9], a sign that the governor was aware that the inhabitants of Brasov had enough connections to know about the Ottoman movements. Although the archives do not preserve the correspondence in this case, it is clear that the town magistrate sent a reply to the governor. Only a few years later, in 1454, Oswald, the mayor of Sibiu, sent more information to the city of Vienna. In his letter, Oswald emphasize with pride his origin from Sibiu and, at the same time, the explanation for the Turks' desire to conquer Sibiu are highlighted:

> I have heard from one of my trusted spies, who had just come from the Turks, that Sibiu is taken by the Turks as the most important city, before other cities of the kingdom of Hungary; therefore the damned Turks often and loudly shout, young and old, without interruption *Cibin, Cibin*! i. e. Sibiu, Sibiu, hoping that if they conquer this city, they will bring all the more easily, by their wickedness, damage and trouble not only to the aforesaid kingdom of Hungary, whose shield is Sibiu, but also to all Christendom[10].

In the second half of the 15th century as well as in the following centuries, these two cities, Brașov and Sibiu, became the main centres for collecting information about the Turks. Not just the Saxon towns had a network of scouts, but also other Transylvanian officials, such as the bishop of Alba Iulia, Ladislas Gereb. He was so well informed in 1493 by one of his scouts of the imminent Turkish attack (*repentina fama turcarum veniret*) that he promptly told Captain George Bechk of Santău (Zantho, Satu-Mare county) to keep his soldiers, horses and weapons ready to intervene when the Turks entered the country next Sunday[11].
On the news road, an important role was played by the towns of Orăștie (Germ. Broos, Hung. Szászváros) and Hațeg. I included those small towns on the spies' route only after identifying some documentary information. Thus, on the evening of 28 September 1466, the members of the magistrate of Orăștie were surprised to

9 In 17th of July 1449: Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor. Acte și scrisori din arhiva orașelor ardelene (Brașov, Sibiu, Bistrița) 1358-1600*, vol. XV/1, ed. Nicolae Iorga (București: Atelierele Grafice Socec, 1911), 35.

10 Ștefan Pascu, Constantin Cihodaru, et al., eds, *Documenta Romaniae Historica*. seria D: *Relații între Țările Române*, vol. I (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1977), 442.

11 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, *Diplomatikai Levéltár*, n. 65159: «quare presentibus vos certificamus. Nam et nos ex omni parte ita certificati sumus eciam ab exploratore nostro qui hec ora reversus est, ut proxime die dominico aut sequenti die procul dubio hoc regnum intrabunt».

receive a trusted man sent by the nobleman Ladislas Kendeffy from Râu de Mori, (Hung. Malomviz, Hunedoara/Hunyad county) who brought the most frightening news: the Turks were in the mountains (probably between Caransebeș and Hațeg) and another army was making its way into Transylvania via Câlnic, near Sibiu. The very worrying news was sent to Sibiu, but remained without consequences. The same document shows the fear, as the sender immediately wrote to the magistrate of Sibiu: «From Orăștie, *celeriter manu*, on the same day, at the same hour, *circa horam vespertinam*»[12]. This shows a close link, a rapid movement by the city authorities to pass on the alarming news as quickly as possible. Another town, right on the border with the Ottoman Empire, less than 100 km from Hațeg, was Caransebeș (Hung. Karánsebes). It can be included among the centres of information on Ottoman troop movements. Being in the vicinity of the Ottoman occupied areas of Serbia, the town is directly linked to the fortresses on the Danube border of the Hungarian Kingdom, Mehadia (Hung. Miháld), Peth, Orșova or Severin (Hung. Szörény). The people of Caransebeș (Karansebes, Caraș-Severin county), like the people of Sibiu (Germ. Hermannstadt, Hung. Szeben, Sibiu county) and Brașov (Germ. Kronstadt, Hung. Brassó, Brașov county), were also linked to the southern Danube area by trade.

That is why I think that, most probably, the news from across the Danube first reached Caransebeș, and then was sent to the various officials of the kingdom. Although the Turkish danger was equally present, no such information has come from the Caransebeș area since the 15th century. Only in the context of the increased pressure on the Danube fortresses after the conquest of Belgrade, Caransebes appears as a centre of the scouts/spies in Turkish matters. A very large amount of information comes from the spring of 1525. In this respect, in addition, the preparation of a large-scale military campaign can be felt, and as a result, the shock wave has reverberated all the way to the border. One such scout was Jacob Pesthy of Caransebeș, who, in February 1525 was paid 2 florins for bringing news of the Turks to the royal court in Buda[13]. An even more important and interesting fact is that Caransebeș had an organised and paid group of spies, if we consider the information that on 1 April 1525, Lucas Margai, the captain of Caransebeș, received 100 gold florins to support his group of scouts. The following year brings a different situation, namely getting first-hand news from soldiers fleeing the Turkish army. On 21 June 1526, Gregory Besenyei from Ciacova (Hung. Csák) and Gregory from Timișoara arrived in Buda with news of the state of affairs in the Turkish camp. For their effort they received 8 florins:

> On the same day (the Thursday nearest before the feast of St. John the Baptist) Gregory Bessenyei of Ciacova and another Gregory of Timișoara, who had fled from Turkey and from the Turkish emperor's army coming to the Royal Majesty with certain news of the Turkish efforts, were given 8 florins in good coin, well weighed[14].

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12 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/1, 62.

13 Costin Feneșan, *Diplomatarium Banaticum*, vol. I (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2016), 307.

14 Feneșan, *Diplomatarium*, 311.

On the southern border line between Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire, the westernmost city was Timișoara (Hung. Temesvár). It can be concluded that in the second half of the 15th century, similarly to Caransebeș, news about Ottoman movements and intentions also came to Timișoara from the occupied Serbian territories, sometimes through Serbian noblemen who had taken refuge in the Hungarian Kingdom and kept in touch with the South-Slav territories. In 1470, Stephen and Demeter Jakšić's henchmen brought news to the Transylvanian voivode, John Pongracz. In turn, he informed the magistrate of Sibiu that he had received truthful news that the Turks crossing the Danube at Vidin (Bulgaria) were heading for Transylvania[15]. In the last decades of the 15th century, Timișoara became an important centre for coordinating anti-Ottoman actions thanks to the presence of Paul Kiniszi. A nobleman originally from the northern part of the Kingdom, in 1479 he became the lord of Timiș county and captain of the Lower Parts, a position from which he coordinated the entire anti-Ottoman defence of the kingdom[16]. He did not limit himself to defending the borders of the realm, but made several raids across the Danube, raiding the territories of Ottoman-occupied Serbia, from where he transferred part of the Christian population to the north of the river[17]. Kiniszi's closeness to the Serbian population was also evident in their use as spies. Among them, we find a certain Dwyo about whom we do not have much data. In 1523 the descendants of Dwyo and his brother had a legal dispute over the Sipzo estate in Timiș County. The estate was received by the two brothers as a reward from the king for their services as scouts for Paul Kiniszi in the Turkish territories[18]. Knowing that Kiniszi died in 1494, the two brothers mentioned in the document of 1523 certainly acted before this date, most likely in the early 1480s when the anti-Ottoman campaigns of the Hungarian troops in Serbia took place. In the 16th century, military events followed one another with even greater speed. The anti-Ottoman front along the Danube was strongly affected by Suleyman Kanunî intervention in imposing rulers in Moldavia and Wallachia, on the one hand, and by the Ottoman Empire's advance to Mohács and Buda and its takeover of Transylvania, on the other. In 1521, more than 50 missions' *ad partes transalpinas*

15 Gustav Gündisch, ed., *Urkundenbuch zur geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen* [Ub], vol. VI (București: Franz Michaelis, 1981), n. 3802: «Venerunt ad nos homines egregiorum Stephani et Demetrii Jachyth veris cum novitatibus, ut Thurci magno bello et exercitu conquisito penes castrum Bodon per vada Danubii transfertantur voluntque illas Transsilvanarum partes subintrare».

16 In this respect see Ioan Hațegan, *Pavel Chinezul* (Timișoara, 1994) and Adrian Magina, "Cognomen a paterno pago inditum. On the origin and social ascension of Paul Kinizsi", *Initial. A review of Medieval Studies*, 8 (2020): 83-100.

17 Adrian Magina, "Le long voyage vers la terre promise: les migrations serbes en Banat (XVe–XVIe siècles)", in *Between Worlds: The age of Jagellonians*, eds. Florin Nicolae Ardelean, Christopher Nicholson, et al., (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2013), 129-140.

18 Adrian Magina, ed., *Acta et documenta partes Regni Hungariae inferiores concernentia 1500-1552* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2020), 119: «Dwyo ad Thurciam per magnificum condam dominum Paulum de Kynis felicis recordationis ad explorandum missus fuerant».

were sent from Sibiu alone over the mountains[19]. In the year of the battle of Mohács (1526), from spring to July, the authorities of Sibiu sent several missions south of the mountains or even south of the Danube: three times Iwan cnez (a certain member of the Romanian elite from the Hungarian kingdom), the reeve of Răşinari (between March and June), twice the reeve Mayna of Sălişte[20]. Another moment of frequent mentions of news and scouts from the Danube to Vienna is 1551-1552, when the Ottoman threat became imminent and troops moved north of the Danube[21], but this is a different story.

NEWS ROUTES, SCOUT ROUTES

The Transylvanian communication network of the 15-16th centuries partly overlapped with the Roman road network, including roads, paths, tracks, fords and bridges, supported by a "network" of inns and taverns, resting places for men and horses. A direct consequence of the shape of this network is the system of human settlements and fortresses. The whole network was constantly changing under the influence of natural factors, such as swelling rivers and melting snow[22].

In the area of the southern border of Transylvania, where the mountains were the strongest defence, it is quite easy to imagine the shortest routes by which the scouts could reach their destination in the shortest time, through the known passes, along the alpine paths where they grazed their sheep or even along the merchants' roads. From Sibiu via Turnu Roşu (Germ. Rothenturm, Hung. Vöröstorony) pass to Wallachia, at the end of the 15th century, there was a narrow road that could only be travelled on horseback[23] and then along the Olt Valley to Bucharest, Turnu Măgurele and from there to Nicopolis or Vidin in Bulgaria. Such a tedious and dangerous route had been made by the Romanian cnez Oprea who was sent on such a mission over the mountains in the summer of 1521, and returned with the news that Mehmet beg was heading for Severin[24]. The envoy from Porcești (near Sibiu) was on his way to Mehedinți, while Barbat had to cross the Danube to Rahova

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19 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. XI, 844-45.

20 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. XI, 844-45.

21 Costin Feneşan, "Banatul Caransebeşului şi Lugojului între Habsburgi şi Poartă în anul 1552", *Studii şi materiale de istorie medie*, 12 (1994): 161-200.

22 Research on the road network in Hungary and medieval Transylvania has been carried out especially recently, see in this regard Magdolna Szilágyi, "Mobility, Roads and Bridges in Medieval Hungary", in *The Economy in Medieval Hungary*, eds. József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, Péter Szabó, et al. (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018), 64-80; Oana Toda, "Reutilizarea medievală a drumurilor romane în Transilvania şi Banat", *Banatica*, 27 (2017), 361-97.

23 Ub, VI, n. 3966, 555: «quomodo quadam via prope eandem civitatem nostram Cibiniensem penes quoddam castrum Weresthoron existens ad partes Transalpinas tendens, per quam res mercimoniales [...] adeo stricta esset, ut vix unus equus dumtaxat sequi alium posset, saepiusque per inundationes aquarum et nivium in tantum obstrueretur, ut nemo per eandem viam ire neque redire posset [...]».

24 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 844.

(Oriahovo, Bulgaria)[25]. From Brașov, however, the scouts took the road to Bucharest via the Rucăr pass to Pitești[26], Buzău and Predeal[27]. A large number of scouts also left Brașov for Bulgaria, heading for *Gercinum and Dresther* (unidentified settlements)[28].

Routes such as Caransebeș – Hațeg – Orăștie – Sibiu – Brașov or Orșova – Severin – Caransebeș – Timișoara were, at the same time, routes of merchants passing to and from the Ottoman Empire with commodities. A route from the Saxon area to central Hungary followed the Mureș Valley, through Gurasada (Hunedoara / Hunyad County) to Lipova (Hung. Lippa) and from there on to the Great Hungarian plain market-towns[29]. It has to be said that few ventured on such a journey alone, as it was much more prudent to join a caravan, such as those of the merchants. But the more often the scouts/spies followed one another, the nearer the danger was felt, and it was very probable that the scouts had walked alone.

INVISIBLE FACES LOST IN HISTORY

Who were the spies? What skills and knowledge did they have to carry out their mission? Not just one man was tasked with getting the news from source to destination. So if a scout left Nicopolis for Sibiu with news of the Turks, the news was carried on from this "information" centre to the Transylvanian voivode by a messenger. Information about the movements of the Turks could come in stages, scouts could meet halfway, as did Francis, the envoy of Sibiu and servant of Peter Schlwm, who had been in Wallachia and met at Turnu Roșu to exchange information[30]. Messages also arrived through stations, if it came via Caransebeș, from across the Danube, which was evident in the case of 1538 when Gregory Vaida together with the Caransebes town council, knowing from their own scouts' information about the state of the Turkish armies, sent a message to the people of Sibiu about the Turkish ships sailing on the Danube[31].

It can be assumed that in the mountainous area of southern Transylvania, from Brașov to Hațeg, and even further, in the area of Caransebeș, hundreds of scouts were active, paid either from the funds of the magistrates of the various towns or from the royal treasury. So many names, so many faces that we do not know and cannot remember. The terms under which scouts are found in documents are most commonly «exploratores nostrorum», «explorator secretus», «agentium», «vespilio», «nuncio», «famulus» but also *my scout* or *my spy*. If the information found the informant, so it was only a circumstantial matter, and the matter exposed was not of particular importance, the person is called *someone*. The terms

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25 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 845.

26 *Quellen zur geschcihte der stadt Kronstadt: Rechnungen aus dem Archiv der Stadt Kronstadt: 1526-1540*, vol. II (Kronstadt: Druck von Albert & Zillich, 1889), 204.

27 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 783.

28 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 783.

29 Ub, IV, 2172.

30 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 845.

31 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/1, 376.

encountered with regard to the task these characters carry out derive from the potential secrecy or importance of the event a *very significant affair*, *in our affairs*, «de rumores Thurcorum», «novitatibus Turcorum», «pro inquirendo novitatibus», «in eadem causa», «in eodem negocio».

An important issue concerning spies is their social status. Intelligence carriers were often people whose lives were spent travelling. Travelling from one side of the border to the other has fostered encounters with a wide variety of situations, people and, obviously, information. Soldiers, officials, merchants, monks and priests are among the best information carriers. Romanian Orthodox priests from the villages in the area of Sibiu appear several times in the accounts of the city. The priest of Răşinari, speaking German and Romanian – *frater popa de Rozonayr* (Răşinari, Stederdorff, Sibiu county)[32], was also sent over the mountains. Two other cases, from Sibiu's information centre, indicate the camouflage of intelligence gathering about Turkish movements underneath the merchants' activity. In 1522, Kasul, a merchant from Wallachia, came to Sibiu with his commodities, but also carried in his luggage certain *novitates* about Mehmet beg[33]. In 1524, under the pretext of buying pigs, a certain Barbath also had to find news of Turkish movements[34].

It seems that good spies were a valuable commodity. In 1524 the city council of Sibiu commissioned the reeve /cnez of Răşinari to cross the mountains in order to collect news, but he was taken prisoner by the Turks.[35] The magistrate of Sibiu, however, did not abandon him, as one might think, but 100 florins were paid for his release[36].

On the other hand, traitors or those who spread fake news were also important. In 1521, one of the servants of Sibiu was sent to catch a Wallachian who came with false news, «qui falsos rumores attulerat»[37].

A prerequisite was knowledge of the language of the population of the territory to which they were sent. Most of the scouts seem to be Romanians from the villages around Sibiu, having been sent to Wallachia, while most of the scouts from the Caransebeş – Timişoara area seem to have been South Slavs. Most probably the news were transmitted orally, but the essence of some was preserved in the letters sent between centres, as is evident, for example from the letter of 1513 belonging to Ladislas Barlabassy, the vice-voivode of Transylvania, who transmitted information about the Turkish plan to attack Sibiu[38]. John Vitez, the captain of Caransebeş, also wrote to Sibiu about the two Turkish commanders – Balibeg and Ferhad Pasha's – and their plan to attack Severin.[39]

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32 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 844.

33 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 845.

34 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 845.

35 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 849.

36 Toma Cosmin Roman, *Sibiul între diplomaţie şi război* (Sibiu: Honterus, 2017), 240.

37 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 844.

38 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/1, 403.

39 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/1, 276.

A direct testimony, however, we find through the voice of the scouts themselves. Thus, it is impossible not to mention Neacșu, a wealthy merchant of Câmpulung (Wallachia), whose information were written in 1521. The document, considered to be the first preserved text in Romanian with the Cyrillic alphabet, is, in fact, an informative sketch[40]. The message was written in the context of the Ottoman preparations for the assault against Hungary, a campaign that eventually led to the fall of Belgrade to Turkish troops.

Dumitru cnez, reeve of Săliștevillage near Sibiu, is another long-lived character in this business. He has been identified as a scout from Sibiu in Wallachia for over 20 years both to the rulers Radu the Great and Mihnea the Bad, as well as to the ban of Craiova (a high dignitary in medieval and early modern Wallachia). In 1509, the ban Barbu of Craiova sent a letter to the people of Sibiu praising the merits of Dumitru as a bearer of news between Craiova and Sibiu: «your lordship must feed such a man, for he carries your words and ours well»[41]. His name is mentioned in the town's registers from 1515 to 1525, but he was active as early as 1504, if we consider the letters of Radu the Great from that year[42]. For two decades he was tasked with finding out news about the Turks and may well have crossed the Danube. By 1510, Dumitru of Sălișteh ad been commissioned with 12 such missions. He had a very good relationship with the boyars Socol and Preda from Wallachia. In 1521, in the context of the Ottoman preparations for the assault on the Hungarian Kingdom under the new Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, the scouts in the southern parts were trying to find out as much as possible about Turkish intentions. In this year, Dumitru was sent on a different mission, on the roads leading to Timișoara for news about the Turks, about the same time that Neacșu was also sending his letter written in Romanian. No letters are known to have been written by Dumitru, but he certainly spoke, in addition to Romanian, German and probably had some knowledge of Slavonic.

Another interesting character is Iwan, reeve of the village of Rășinari, also Romanian in origin. He is often mentioned in the registers of the magistrate of Sibiu between 1515 and 1530. In the events of 1521, he crossed the Danube to Vidin *explorandi gratia*, and in 1526, between March and June, he crossed the mountains in Wallachia at least three times.

It must be said that another group of couriers were sent to the voivode of Transylvania or even to the king. As far as the financial side is concerned, a large amount of money was allocated to each centre. The group of scouts from Caransebeș received 100 florins; for a mission in Wallachia the city of Sibiu paid between 50 dinars and 3 florins and a journey to the Transylvanian vice voivode cost the city between 1.5 and 3.5 florins. For carrying a letter to the king in Buda were paid 5 florins. For a single errand, the journey to and from Vidin, a spy named Ystok received 6

40 Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XI, 843.

41 Ioan Lupaș, "Din relațiile Transilvaniei cu Țara Românească: activitatea cnezului Dumitru din Sălișteh", *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Cluj,* 4 (1961): 72.

42 *Quellen zur Geschichte Siebenbürgens aus saschichen Archiven,* I: *Rechnungen aus dem archiv des Stadt Hermanstadt 1380-1516* (Hermanstadt: Druck bei Franz Michaelis, 1880), 20; Lupaș, "Din relațiile Transilvaniei", 70.

florins from the magistrate of Sibiu. In 1492 alone, the magistrate of Sibiu, headed by George Sartor, spent 37 florins for 18 missions over the mountains for scouts in Wallachia (in addition to official delegations to the vice voivode or to Moldova or to the congregation of the seven Saxon seats)[43]. In the same year, four names stand out: Marco, Dussa, Petrus Barbocz and a certain Balczog. In 1521, the same magistrate spent almost 100 florins for more than 50 missions over the mountains. It is visible that the number of scouts and the number of missions have tripled in less than 30 years in only one centre of information.

CONCLUSIONS

In the 15-16th centuries some characteristics of spies network stand out: 1. The centres of the scouts/spies were border towns; 2. the number of requests with news about the Turks increased on the eve of battles or alleged Ottoman campaigns to the Central Europe; 3. the scouts were valuable and their work was financially supported by the king and local officials; 4. the routes of the spies coincided with routes that were known for merchants, but not easily accessible even at the time; 5. they had a diverse social status, but most of them were Romanians or South Slavs from the settlements near the important urban centres of the border area. Across the mountains on south of the Danube area each created their own network of relationships, based on common goals and friendship.

43 Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Sibiu, *Magistratul orașului și scaunului Sibiu. Colecția de documente medievale*, U V, nr. 1183.

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