

# Braşov (Kronstadt) in the Defence against the Turks (1438–1479)

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With the Battle of Kosovo in the year 1389, the final downfall of the Bulgarian kingdom in the year 1393, and the resulting seizure of the Danube ports by the Ottoman invaders, a new epoch of menace and threat began for the whole of South-East Europe. As Gustav Gündisch once so aptly commented in a newspaper article following the terminology of Şerban Papacostea:<sup>1</sup>

It was the appearance of the Turks on the Lower Danube in the last quarter of the fourteenth century that altered the political landscape in this region. The contrast that took on the character of a "permanent confrontation" was formed.<sup>2</sup>

In the following article, light will be shed upon the consequences of this state of affairs, as well as the role and importance of the town of Braşov (Kronstadt) in the repulsion of Ottoman expansion. To be more precise, the period covered will stretch from the time of the campaign of Murad II against Transylvania during the summer of 1438 – which is considered to be the first fully organized advance by the Ottomans against this region – to the Battle of Breadfield on October 13, 1479.

The defensive battles of John Hunyadi against the Ottoman army, as well as the rule of the Hungarian King Matthew Corvinus, for instance, fall within this time-frame. At the same time, personalities such as the Wallachian Voivod Vlad the Impaler (Țepeş) and Stephen the Great also appear on the scene. The persona of Vlad became notorious<sup>3</sup> by way of later pamphlets later envogue in European literature, whereas the latter became famous for his masterly repulsion of the Ottoman troops in a similar manner to John Hunyadi.

All of these figures are united, not only by the – naturally only described as such from the European perspective – phase of the "repulsion of the Turks" in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> They also shared the common factor that they were all also, in one way or another, connected to Braşov, or even maintained, to an extent, correspondence with the town. On a parallel, on the side of the Ottomans, the reigns of both of the Sultans Murad II and Mehmed II, known as "the Conqueror", fall within this period of time. Their military planning and politics in consequence also influenced the course of events for Braşov. At the same time, the town also experienced a wave of the plague,<sup>5</sup> social unrest<sup>6</sup> and a massive earthquake,<sup>7</sup> all events which, in addition to the danger posed by the Ottomans, fell upon and involved the entire population of the town. However, the town succeeded in experiencing one of the most significant high points in its development during this period of time.

## Braşov and the Ottoman Expansion up until 1438

Confrontation with Ottoman expansion began for Braşov at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the treaty with Mircea the Elder in the year 1395 which was part of King Sigismund of Luxembourg's<sup>8</sup> anti-Ottoman policy and was signed in Braşov.<sup>9</sup> The first confirmed invasion into Burzenland, which took place via the Bran Pass, was apparently in the same year.<sup>10</sup> It was because of its geographical position at the mouths of several mountain passes that the security of the Törzbürg Pass was one of the most important factors in the defence agenda regarding the danger posed by the Ottomans. With the exception of the retreat of the Ottoman Army across Burzenland after the campaign of Murad II, all of the invasions of the area took place by way of the surrounding passes. The position of Braşov in a protected, shallow valley, facing a North-Eastern direction, had its effect upon the specifications of the town's defences.

It was due to external political processes and events within both Europe and the Ottoman Empire that, apart from individual smaller incidents of pillaging by irregular troops,<sup>11</sup> two decades of relative peace for Braşov followed this first invasion. That Bran was in the possession of Mircea the Elder during this period was also a determining factor.<sup>12</sup>

It was not until the year 1421 that the first invasion of Burzenland<sup>13</sup> that can be confirmed by sources took place, although King Sigismund declared Braşov to be in a state of emergency in 1419.<sup>14</sup> In 1420 the King urged the surrounding rural population to partake in the building of the town's defences which were, however, not sufficiently advanced to repulse the attack that took place the following year.<sup>15</sup> Leopold Kupelwieser referred in his military history research to the Predeal Pass as the route taken by the Ottoman troops,<sup>16</sup> a fact that has, however, neither been taken up nor confirmed in later works.

The disastrous invasion caused a longer-lasting crisis in Braşov. Churches and housing had been to a larger part destroyed and the majority of the population had been taken captive.<sup>17</sup> As a result of the intervention of the Wallachian Voivod, a great many of these captives had been able to regain their freedom in Wallachia.<sup>18</sup> However, until the beginning of the 1430s, a longer-lasting crisis in the population, caused by the withdrawal of a large portion of the population as a result of the dangerous situation, appears to have taken place.<sup>19</sup>

However, at this time, under the auspices of King Sigismund, who in 1426 and 1427 was even in Braşov in person,<sup>20</sup> the town succeeded in extending its defences. As a consequence of the situation within Wallachia and Hungarian politics, it was not until 1432 that there was a renewed invasion, which apparently also took place via the Bran Pass.<sup>21</sup> Although large areas of Burzenland, as well as the suburbs of Braşov, were to a great extent destroyed, the town's defences were apparently this time capable of withstanding the attack.<sup>22</sup> There was also fear of a renewed Ottoman invasion in the following year which is not traceable in the sources.<sup>23</sup> During this year, however, a revolt must have occurred among the population.<sup>24</sup> The next two Ottoman invasions did not take place until five years later in 1438.

### Braşov and the Ottoman Danger in the Period from 1438–1479

After the invasion of that year, the town succeeded in 1432 at the latest, within its peripheral geographical position, in coming to an arrangement with the situation of the threat posed by the Ottomans. This becomes clear in the rapid advancement and steady growth of political influence of Braşov in this period. The prerequisites for this development were, above all, not only a good information network, but also an extensively expanded system of defence for the town. It was these factors that enabled the population to concentrate on the wider political situation, although their interest was primarily directed towards the security of the profit-making trade routes.

All of the information about Ottoman troop movements or activity in the Ottoman Empire was communicated in a regular exchange of information between Transylvania, the rest of the Kingdom of Hungary, as well as Wallachia and Moldavia. This frequently occurred as part of a mutual exchange which often was, however, an instrument of negotiation as a counter-move for other idealistic and material gains. At the same time the town itself took on the role of both a deliverer and recipient of information. Information received was also passed on.<sup>25</sup> During this time, in actual fact, the towns of southern Transylvania and, above all, Braşov, delivered the main bulk of information about the troop movements of the Ottomans to the Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>26</sup> Such information was equally exchanged between these towns, such as was the case between Braşov and Sibiu (Hermannstadt).<sup>27</sup> Messengers on horseback conveyed the transmission of information.<sup>28</sup> In the case of invasion information could also be transmitted in other ways such as “the furthering of a sword dipped in blood”,<sup>29</sup> or the use of acoustic signals as well as smoke and fire beacons.<sup>30</sup>

In 1438 the first great organized invasion of Ottoman troops into the territory of Transylvania took place.<sup>31</sup> After the end of the so-called Transylvanian people's revolt and a year after the death of King Sigismund of Luxembourg, Sultan Murad II personally undertook an invasion of Transylvania in the summer of 1438. The area surrounding Braşov was affected during the retreat of the Ottoman Army.<sup>32</sup>

For the first time Transylvania was subjected to the actual violence of an organized deployment of Ottoman troops, the waves of which also reached Braşov. On the other hand, the Ottoman troops were for the first time confronted by the, at this stage, heavily fortified and difficult to take towns of Sibiu and Braşov. The collective concept of strategic defence of the towns of Transylvania, which made it impossible for the Ottomans to establish themselves on a permanent basis,<sup>33</sup> was able to prove its efficacy in its repulsion of this powerful invasion.

Shortly afterwards, in September 1438, a renewed invasion into the surroundings of Braşov, which apparently took place by way of the neighbouring passes, occurred.<sup>34</sup> Beforehand, in February of the same year, the Voivod of Wallachia had assured Albrecht, King of Hungary, that Braşov would be made secure against Ottoman invasion.<sup>35</sup> Such assurances of protection on the part of Wallachia also appear in later times,<sup>36</sup> where, above all, they are made use of as an argument during negotiations.<sup>37</sup>

The invasion itself is directly confirmed by news from the Székely Count Emmerich Bebek to the Braşov Council. This news was at the same time concerned with the activities of Ottoman

soldiers in the Bran Pass area which the Székely Count for that reason wanted to have made impassable.<sup>38</sup>

The invasion in September of the year 1438 is also the last attack on Burzenland that is confirmed by source material until the year 1479, although this area remained under the impression of constant threat and danger as a result of events outside the country. Invasions on a smaller scale are not to be excluded, either.<sup>39</sup> One source reports of a further invasion in Transylvania which is not, however, corroborated elsewhere and which might possibly be brought into connection with the first great invasion of 1438.<sup>40</sup>

Under John Hunyadi, first as the Voivod in Transylvania and later also as the Hungarian Vice-Regent, a new and decisive phase of retaliation against Ottoman conquests began, in which Braşov became also heavily involved. This manifested itself in a variety of areas and developments which continued under Matthias Corvinus, as well. The continuation of the building of defences, together with a flourishing production of weapons, and Braşov's role as a deliverer of information, formed a part of these developments.

The town was frequently entrusted with the procurement of information about the Ottomans, as well as other substantial items of information and surveillance tasks which were often concerned with Wallachia and its position with regard to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>41</sup> In two letters to the Council of Braşov in 1443 and 1444 John Hunyadi wrote of his successes on the battlefield.<sup>42</sup> Such reports about direct confrontations in battle followed from outside sources, too. At the same time rumours and false information were intermittently spread, for example, when the Wallachian Voivod Vladislav II expressed his opinion in 1448 on the whereabouts of John Hunyadi in connection with the news about his defeat: "Dubium est de vita ipsius [...]."<sup>43</sup>

This is not the only case in which false information is given.<sup>44</sup> The fact that the town was exposed to a variety of different sources of information has led to uncertain perceptions and a fluctuating status of information. In some cases the town also received extensive information from Wallachia e.g., on Ottoman conquests in Albania.<sup>45</sup>

There must have been a far better and even more extensive exchange of oral information which may only be partially gleaned from documents in which oral informants are named to endorse their authenticity.<sup>46</sup> The high density of trade in the town must in itself have produced a great machinery of rumours which reached the population in all parts of the country and thus quenched the thirst of people for the latest news.

Ultimately the Town Council would have mainly relied upon the town's own system of scouts with regard to events within the immediate geographical surroundings. Informants with town connections were available for events and political proceedings outside that area. One of these informants was Johannes Reudel who lived in Vienna. Two of his letters to the Council of Braşov from the years of 1454 and 1455 have survived.<sup>47</sup> In these he gossiped on agitating political proceedings of which he had heard, and expressed his critical views with regard to the Papal call for a crusade against the Ottomans. Braşov also appears to have had a secret informant at the Court of Wallachia, as may be ascertained from a document of 1476.<sup>48</sup>

Information about the messenger network maintained by Braşov can be found in a document of June 8, 1475. In this document Matthias Corvinus forbade the demand for the payment "of spies and guards in the Hatzeg Country" by Braşov "because they have to support scouts in the Romanian principalities and in Turkey themselves". By the geographical naming of the areas of deployment "in Wallachia, Moldavia quam etiam in Thurcia", one also learns that the messenger network was in constant operation and not only used for individual operations.<sup>49</sup>

The conduct of Braşov towards the respective Wallachian Voivods was mainly determined by the political relationship of the Wallachians towards the Ottoman Empire, or by higher orders.<sup>50</sup> There are, however, examples of independent action with regard to this. The reasons for this were the economic interests of Braşov which often led to diverging patterns of behaviour with regard to this question. The Voivods of Wallachia themselves appear, even in phases of political reconciliation with the Ottoman Empire, to have endeavoured to remain in favour with Braşov.<sup>51</sup> At the same time Wallachia was able to take on the role of a mediator between Braşov and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>52</sup>

In 1456 Vlad Ţepeş secured himself a right to refuge in Braşov in the event of an Ottoman invasion.<sup>53</sup> Four days after confirming that, he stood under threat by Ottoman troops and turned to Braşov once again. In view of an expected Ottoman envoy, he asked the Braşov Council to consider the influence his appearance would have and for that reason asked for

troops to be sent to frighten off the Ottomans.<sup>54</sup> A similar-sounding demand from Wallachia also appeared in 1473.<sup>55</sup> Subsequent to the conflict between Braşov and Vlad Ţepeş there are records from the year 1460 concerning suggestions of the latter for a treat between himself, Burzenland and Braşov, as well as the so-called Seven and Two Seats of Transylvania, in which reciprocal military support and protection, and the exchange of information are mentioned.<sup>56</sup>

In connection with the Ottoman threat there was a tension as a result of events apart from politics. In 1472 inhabitants of Braşov robbed Wallachian refugees who had escaped from the Ottomans.<sup>57</sup> There were also disagreements about trade with Ottoman wares.<sup>58</sup> Further tension arose because of the harbouring in Braşov of Wallachian bojars who were not well-disposed towards the respective Voivod.<sup>59</sup>

The exchange of news between Moldavia and Braşov relating to the Ottomans does not become tangible until later and is connected with the defensive campaign of Stephen the Great against the Ottoman expansion. At the same time Braşov provided him with information about the movements of Ottoman troops.<sup>60</sup> In further correspondence that has survived, the Moldavian Voivod even demanded the cessation of food deliveries to Wallachia for the reason that Wallachia was subordinate to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>61</sup>

This correspondence, because of its short succession in time, provides an indication of the density of contemporary traffic of information which must have existed between Stephan the Great in Moldavia and Braşov. It also indicates the speed at which the exchange of information was carried out. It was apparently possible within six days of sending off a letter to convey the reply as well as the following words of thanks.

The growing political significance of Braşov was also evident in its involvement and active participation in the supra-regional political scene. Here the town was also involved in the renewal of the *unio trium nationum* between the Hungarian nobility, Székely people and Transylvanian Saxons in 1459 which was especially directed against the Ottomans.<sup>62</sup> There also exists a letter to Braşov in connection with a treaty planned between Matthias Corvinus and Michael Szilágyi against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>63</sup> The Council was also informed about and involved in efforts for peace on the part of Wallachia.<sup>64</sup>

An announcement by John Hunyadi on December 17, 1449, in which he reports on the settlement of a ceasefire with the Ottoman Empire for which envoys of the Sultan were to go to Braşov, is of particular interest.<sup>65</sup> In the following year he wrote to the Council that he “would come to the lower parts to transform the ceasefire with the Turks into the desired peace”.<sup>66</sup> These negotiations were possibly held in Braşov. Above all, it appears that the town would have been a suitable place for them as a result of its geographical position on the border of the Hungarian Empire.

The mood of the population when confronted with such guests may only be guessed at. It was very probably one of a great distrust and disfavour. The attitude of the members of the Council would have been governed by their interests. Prejudices and hostility towards enemies were certainly present on every social level.

There was undoubtedly a daily exchange with the population of the Ottoman Empire. The presence of Turkish traders is evident in a document from the middle of the 70s of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In this document the Wallachian Voivod Basarab Laiotă informed the Braşov Town Council “that a Turkish trader who is a good friend of him and has many goods has come into the country” and “calls upon all those willing to buy to bargain and trade with the Turks in Bucharest Castle and ensures free conduct for the return journey”.<sup>67</sup> Trade with oriental goods was an important component of Braşov’s commerce. The town was increasingly reliant upon the trade with Turkish merchants at its borders because of the repeated interruption of important trade routes.

In the granting of privileges, from which Braşov also profited, the aspect of the “repulsion of the Turks” was mentioned time and again,<sup>68</sup> as in the important charter of 1461 in which Matthias Corvinus granted the town the right to seal documents with red wax from that time onwards. One of the reasons given for the granting of this privilege is, among others, the role of Braşov in the battle against the Turks.<sup>69</sup>

Besides some documents relating to military levies for all of the Transylvanian Saxons,<sup>70</sup> there were also military directives for Braşov. For example, a command by the Voivod in Transylvania from 1477 in which the careful guarding of the borders is ordered has survived.<sup>71</sup> In 1467 Braşov was to a large part released from the duty of sending fighting men and in 1470 finally from all further “supply of harness and provisions duties”.<sup>72</sup> A year later Matthias Corvinus forbade “the participation of the Saxons of Braşov and the Burzenland in

the campaign against the Turks, as they have promised him their financial support”. The exact sum is unfortunately not named, Corvinus only mentioning a “grandem summam flororum auri”.<sup>73</sup> Braşov had to make a contribution towards the maintenance of the Hungarian mercenary army, too.<sup>74</sup> Even further privileges were at any rate secured in course of active defence negotiations.<sup>75</sup> The development in the 60s and 70s of the 15<sup>th</sup> century leads especially in the direction of an exemption from military levies and privileges with regard to all other remaining activities. Hence follows how important the role of Braşov actually was in the defence of Transylvania. This development also shows how the King became reliant on economically and financially potent towns.

The continuous extension and further building of fortifications represented a substantial element in the “repulsion of the Turks”. Larger financial allowances to this end are known from the years 1439 and 1440.<sup>76</sup> In 1454 the inhabitants of the surrounding localities were summoned by the King to help build the fortifications.<sup>77</sup> Similar orders to the surrounding localities are verifiable for the time beforehand, reaching back to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>78</sup>

The town fortifications appear to have originally consisted of palisades with wooden gates, together with pitfalls, moats and ramparts.<sup>79</sup> In the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, even before the first Ottoman invasions, the replacement of these constructions by stone walls had begun.<sup>80</sup> The completion of the wall took, however, until the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, so that “the constant carrying-out of work in long phases of construction partly took place in face of the danger posed by the Turks”.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, however, original defences still served their purpose, for example, by protecting the outer areas of the towns, namely the suburbs.<sup>82</sup>

Simultaneously to the enlargement of the wall, the town’s defences were also completed by further defensive constructions:

At the corners of the town, as well as at other strategic points, strong bastions were constructed. Outside the town walls there were moats everywhere, as well as ponds, which were intended to prevent approaches by the enemy, or at least to make them more difficult.<sup>83</sup>

That the town’s defences in the invasion of 1432 in all probability held against the attack might indicate that the construction of the first ringed wall of defence had already been completed by this time. In a document of 1432, moreover, a tower is mentioned which apparently also belonged to the inner town wall.<sup>84</sup> In course of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the defences known nowadays as the Black and White Towers were also constructed which represented important strategic points in the whole concept of Braşov’s defence system. As the so-called Brassovia Castle on the battlements no longer fitted in with this concept, it was dismantled in about 1450 and its building materials were re-used in the town’s defences.<sup>85</sup> In 1455 there was still a chapel on the site of the castle which had apparently once been part of the castle and which was only allowed to be demolished following the permission previously granted by the Archbishop and in return for the setting up of an altar in the Church of Mary.<sup>86</sup>

The church and refuge castles which were otherwise so widely spread in Transylvania were, considering the extensively-built ring of defence around the town, superfluous. On a comparison of length, the wall of defence was one of the longest in the whole of Transylvania. At least the second of the four partly ringed walls around the town must have already been constructed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>87</sup> The wall itself was about twelve metres high and was equipped with three town gates.<sup>88</sup>

Alongside the construction industry, and as a result of the danger posed by the Ottomans, the weapons industry flourished more than ever. The first evidence of an order to the town for weapons by John Hunyadi stems from 1443. He ordered battle and siege weapons from the Council and, that is, “currus Thaboriorum simul cum bombardis, pixidibus, machinis et cunctis ingeniis”.<sup>89</sup> With the first he meant specially-equipped Hussite wagon-fortresses<sup>90</sup> with which Hungary had first come into contact at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In a later document they are mentioned in connection with Hunyadi’s engagements against Murad II.<sup>91</sup> As the production of these wagon-fortresses was apparently not known at that time to the inhabitants of Braşov, Hunyadi sent a craftsman from Bohemia, who was to instruct them in the process.<sup>92</sup> A little later the next of Hunyadi’s letters followed.<sup>93</sup> The Bohemian craftsman had apparently been greeted in an inappropriate manner and with laughter. His instructions as to the production of the wagon-fortresses had not been carried out, resulting in a lack of production. John Hunyadi admonished the inhabitants of Braşov that they were to produce the wagon-fortresses “non tantum pro nobis sed pro tota christianitate”.<sup>94</sup> The

historical evidence which this testimony gives of the mindset of the craftsmen of Braşov is particularly absorbing. They apparently did not regard it as necessary to engage themselves in a technology that was both strange and foreign to them. Neither were they prepared to let a foreigner instruct them in this process, as they believed that they were able to rely on their own weapons which were at any rate technologically advanced. In this context a marked sense of competition certainly exerted its influence upon the craftsmen.

However, this incident certainly did not represent a conscious violation of duties towards Hunyadi. The craftsmen themselves were undoubtedly aware of the threat posed by the Ottoman troops and the significance of weapon production. At the same time it must be borne in mind that the last invasion that had affected the inner population of the town had finished ten years before. Hunyadi's admonishment appears to have taken its effect, as no further document relating to this issue remains.

In Hunyadi's previously quoted letter, firearms were also mentioned.<sup>95</sup> We acquire first knowledge of the new craft of firearms production in 1435 when gunpowder is referred to.<sup>96</sup> Under John Hunyadi all warfare was adjusted to accommodate this development. Matthias Corvinus also ordered firearms in Braşov.<sup>97</sup> By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the number of firearms producers had risen significantly, although the classical production of weapons continued simultaneously throughout the whole of the century.<sup>98</sup> Numbers are available for at least the end of the century: "It emerges in the tax lists from 1475 to 1500 that there were still 22 bowmakers, 21 shield makers and sword makers in Braşov at this time."<sup>99</sup>

Repeated orders for weapons by Hunyadi show that the production of even large quantities of weapons in a relatively short period of time did not pose a logistic problem for Braşov.<sup>100</sup> Hunyadi apparently ordered smaller amounts of weapons, in all probability for his personal entourage, too.<sup>101</sup> Not only production, but also repairs to damaged materials brought in contracts for the craftsmen.<sup>102</sup>

In the sources it is to be seen that, alongside the usual production of firearms, larger siege weapons such as those used, for example, in the Siege of Constantinople in 1453 were produced.<sup>103</sup> The great cannon which was used here is also said to have been produced by a craftsman said to be from Transylvania. It is not known whether he came from Braşov or whether he acquired his knowledge there. Braşov itself was provided with enough weapons for the defence of the town. These were necessary to guarantee the full efficacy of the town's fortifications.<sup>104</sup>

Several documents are authentic proof of the weapons trade beyond the borders of Transylvania, especially that with Wallachia. Even Stephan the Great placed his trust in the weapons craftsmanship of the inhabitants of Braşov, as evident in a source from the beginning of 1476.<sup>105</sup>

Deliveries of weapons to one's own armies often had to take place by way of other countries, for example Wallachia. The Wallachian Voivod Vladislav, for example, asked for permission in a document of 1453 regarding a delivery of weapons to Kilia for this to take place via the towns of Târgovişte and Brăila, so that the delivery could proceed in secret and without danger.<sup>106</sup> A year later further instructions followed, this time given by Hunyadi himself.<sup>107</sup> Fear that such deliveries outside Transylvania could fall into the hands of enemies was certainly present for the Council of Braşov. The immediate threat was, however, towards the delivery transports themselves.

At the end of 1445 the Wallachian Voivod Vlad Dracul requested the delivery of "bows, arrows, firearms and salpeter" in connection with his conquests in southern Wallachia.<sup>108</sup> The Voivod was apparently dependent on this delivery in order to strengthen the defences of the seized town.

In the course of the export of weapons outside the Kingdom of Hungary there were also disagreements between the craftsmen and the town council, as was the case in 1452. A servant of the Wallachian Voivod Vladislav II had bought shields in Braşov, but was at any rate hindered in their consequent export by the town council.<sup>109</sup> At the same time this was probably a short-term, politically self-motivated intervention by the town council. Braşov must have been supporting the pretender to the throne and later Voivod Vlad Ţepeş in opposition to the policy of the Kingdom of Hungary towards Wallachia.<sup>110</sup> This could provide the explanation of the behaviour of the town council towards the man-servant of the Voivod who was in power. It is unfortunately no longer possible to ascertain whether the craftsmen sold weapons against previous instructions by the town council, or whether the hindrance of the exports by the town council followed afterwards.

In 1456 there was apparently a similar incident in connection with the recommendation of a certain Župan Stoic to the Council of Braşov by Vlad Ţepeş, which probably referred to the personal weapons master of the prince.<sup>111</sup>

In 1475 the Wallachian Voivod Basarab Laiotă complained about the buying of weapons in Braşov. In a document he made objections about the veto on the export of weapons and iron and threatened that he could “buy enough iron, and even cheaper, from the Turks”.<sup>112</sup> A further document of Basarab declares “that the inhabitants of Braşov do not deliver products such as shields, crossbows, ironware and weapons of all kinds”. The Voivod added the comment: “I do not know what you are doing and what you expect. Do you want to incite a rebellion against me or what are your intentions? I do not know.”<sup>113</sup> A year later he asked for a tax rebate for the delivery of weapons for which he sent one of his man-servants to Braşov.<sup>114</sup>

Finally, it is interesting to draw a comparison with the production of weapons in Sibiu at the same time. Nearly all the surviving documents come from the chancellery of Matthias Corvinus.<sup>115</sup> However, it is also possible to identify other purchasers,<sup>116</sup> among others also Stephen Báthory who, by the way, issued the document from Braşov.<sup>117</sup> By comparing the documents which have survived in both towns, it is possible to gather that, at least at the time of John Hunyadi, Braşov played a great role in matters concerning the production of weapons.

The danger posed by the Ottomans also had an effect upon the Church. Letters of indulgence for the Church of Mary in Braşov followed repeatedly.<sup>118</sup> Firstly, these were a sign of the significance and symbolic character of the Church in the light of the Ottoman danger. They were equally, however, an indicator of the massive destruction by the invasion of 1421, as well as of the enormous financial burden posed on the Church due to building activities.

A document of John Hunyadi, in which he lays a protective hand upon the church in Braşov is particularly interesting. In it he forbade “the army which was marching off to the Turkish war to store things in their courtyards or to harm them in any other way”.<sup>119</sup> This document from the middle of 1444 gives additional evidence on the consequences that the maintenance of an army could have for one’s own territory.

The effects of the Ottoman threat for individual inhabitants of Braşov are difficult to ascertain from the sources. Interesting evidence is given in 1470 by a widow in Braşov about Joerg Hoen from Petersberg who was taken prisoner by the Ottomans in Adrianapolis.<sup>120</sup>

Several documents of 1479 record that there had been a smaller invasion of Burzenland which must have taken place by way of the Bran Pass.<sup>121</sup> On April 20<sup>th</sup> Stephen the Great asked for information on the movement of Ottoman troops, upon which the Council wrote about the invasion to Transylvania a few days later, asking the Moldavian Voivod for quick support.<sup>122</sup> At the same time it is interesting that the concept of the reply of the Council of Braşov “is written in a great hurry and difficult to read” which may also be read as an indication of the immediate danger and necessity for swift action.

Immediately beforehand, on April 10<sup>th</sup>, an order for the supply of provisions for Bran had been given, a command that was repeated at the beginning of July.<sup>123</sup> The invasion, considering the correspondence with Stephen the Great, is probably to be set within this period of time, that is, from April 10<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of July. On August 14<sup>th</sup> Stephen Báthory finally asked the Braşov Council to send messengers to Wallachia and bring him information about the Ottoman troops – a letter that may already be regarded as a first sign of the Battle of Breadfield that followed two months later.<sup>124</sup>

This battle on October 13, 1479 can certainly be rated as a successful counterpart to the disastrous invasion of 1438. This time there was an opportune intervention against the Ottoman army which prevented a further advance. The Ottoman deployment of troops was certainly of a similar dimension to that led by the Sultan in 1438. This time the invasion of Transylvania by Ottoman troops was via the area of the Unterwald.<sup>125</sup> During the withdrawal of the Ottoman troops Stephen Báthory succeeded in challenging them at the so-called Battle of the Breadfield in which the Ottoman Army was decisively beaten.<sup>126</sup>

That the attack in general did not follow across the Burzenland is, however, due to the diplomatic intervention of the Wallachian Voivod who further re-affirmed that he would keep the Ottomans at a distance and that it would once more be secure to trade in Wallachia.<sup>127</sup> On December 21<sup>st</sup>, two months after the battle, Stephen Báthory asked Braşov to provide him “die noctuque cum verissimis famis” with news and that this information was also to be shared with the Wallachian Voivod.<sup>128</sup>

## The Further Course of Events until 1500

Even though a further threat of invasion remained for Braşov and Transylvania, and two such invasions, as evident in the sources, followed in 1493, the year 1479 still represents a decisive turning-point in the history of Transylvania in connection with the repulsion of Ottoman danger in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was, at the very least, the last invasion of such dimensions until the Battle of Mohács.

Fears of renewed Ottoman campaigns against Transylvania had certainly materialized once again in 1481 and in the following year.<sup>129</sup> The same was true of the years 1487 and 1488 which in the latter case led to Braşov being freed “from all military levies, apart from the altercations with the Turks in Moldavia and Wallachia”.<sup>130</sup> Fear of invasion is also tangible in the year 1491.<sup>131</sup> In the same year the well-known defence rules of Braşov originated, in which exact rules of behaviour as well as a defence plan in the case of an invasion were drawn up.<sup>132</sup> This shows that the threat and fear of further invasions were also ever-present after the Battle of Breadfield in the last years of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, indications of such invasions appear in the documents of the previous years again and again,<sup>133</sup> leading to the already-mentioned “permanent state of confrontation”.

Both of the last invasions in the 15<sup>th</sup> century confirmed in sources followed fourteen years after the Battle of Breadfield. In the winter of 1492/93, precisely at the end of January 1493, the Turks succeeded in carrying out a surprise attack which was directed against the area surrounding Sibiu.<sup>134</sup> The outcome, however, was apparently that this Ottoman expedition was also defeated during its retreat.<sup>135</sup> The last known invasion, which was only of smaller dimensions, took place against Burzenland, apparently also again by way of the Bran Pass.<sup>136</sup> Afterwards there is no further invasion confirmed in the records: “During the following years sources refer only to the fears of Turkish invasions.”<sup>137</sup>

The critical evaluation and interpretation of the sources – including the Ottoman campaign of 1395, as well as that against Oradea in 1473 – shows that there were altogether thirteen<sup>138</sup> invasions of differing manner and dimensions, eight of these in connection with the Burzenland, that is, respectively Braşov, which can be found and confirmed in the records with regard to Transylvania as a whole in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. With the exception of the retreat of 1438, which began in and followed on from Sibiu, as well as that of 1421 via the Predeal Pass, every advance in that direction of Braşov or the Burzenland was apparently by way of the Bran Pass, while the second invasion of 1438 would have taken place by way of several passes. As already mentioned above, a larger number of smaller invasions and expeditions, especially those by irregular Ottoman troops, have to be taken into account.

## Conclusion

To sum up, one can assume that the contribution of the town in just that phase of the “repulsion of the Turks” consisted less of active help at arms and more in the maintenance of a widely extensive network of information, the production and delivery of weapons and in other logistical as well as political tasks. The town played a significant role in the whole strategic defence belt formed by the towns in southern Transylvania. This made it almost impossible for Ottoman troops to maintain a position in these places.

At the same time, the respective Hungarian rulers remained in close contact with Braşov, a contact which they strengthened not only by continual correspondence and the granting of privileges, but also by personal visits to the town. The political significance of Braşov was, as part of this process, additionally heightened by its being the place where treaties with the Ottoman Empire were signed, thus becoming the stage for politics beyond the Empire. With the exception of more difficult phases of conflict involving Vlad Ţepeş, the Wallachian rulers were, even in phases in which they were close to the Ottomans, interested in securing the favour of the town. Relationships with the Moldavian prince Stephen the Great were, above all, determined by the supportive role of Braşov in its anti-Ottoman endeavours.

To conclude, it appears important to point once more to the fact that the danger posed by Ottoman expansion in the above-mentioned aspects also manifested itself in a positive way for Braşov, from which the town was able to profit considerably. Flourishing and technologically-advanced craftsmanship, a highly-developed building craft and the acquisition of influential political power and autonomy were the consequences. The advance of the military borders in the direction of the Hungarian Empire also brought Turkish traders to the

outskirts of the town. In this way the aspect of danger in the period of time covered here fits seamlessly into one of the most significant successful phases of the development of the town of Braşov.

Translated by Janet Beham

### Notes

- 1 He refers to the term "caractère d'une confrontation permanente" in Papacostea, Serban: *La Moldavie État tributaire de l'Empire Ottoman au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: le cadre international des rapports établis en 1455–1456*. In: *Revue Romaine d'Histoire* 13 (1974), pp. 445-461, here p. 454.
- 2 Gündisch, Gustav: *Eine innere Gesetzmäßigkeit. Die Schicksalsgemeinschaft Siebenbürgens mit der Walachei und der Moldau in der Türkenabwehr*. In: *Neuer Weg. Tageszeitung des Landesrates der Front der sozialistischen Einheit*, 12.03.1977, p. 4; cf. also Gündisch, Gustav: *Das gemeinsame Schicksal Siebenbürgens, der Moldau und der Walachei im Kampf gegen die Türken*. In: *Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde* 21/1 (1978), pp. 34-39, here p. 35.
- 3 Cf. Cazacu, Matei: *Dracula. Suivi de Capitaine Vampire*. Paris: Tallandier 2004, esp. pp. 205-210; also Cazacu, Matei: *L'histoire du prince Dracula en Europe centrale et orientale (XV<sup>e</sup> siècle): présentation, édition critique, traduction et commentaire*. Genève: Droz 1988 (Publ. de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, IV<sup>e</sup> Section, Sciences Historiques et Philologiques 5, Hautes études médiévales et modernes 61).
- 4 The expression of the "repulsion of the Turks" as such was, above all, established in the course of older historiography and is still to be found in research and literature. It appears, however, especially with regard to some of the aspects that are covered in the following essay, to be to a large part lacking in differentiation in its use. For this reason this expression is given in quotation marks. Furthermore an attempt will be made to differentiate between the use of the words "Turk" and "Ottoman".
- 5 Philippi, Maja: *Die Bürger von Kronstadt im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Sozialstruktur einer siebenbürgischen Stadt im Mittelalter*. Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau 1986 (*Studia Transylvanica* 13), p. 219.
- 6 *Ub. V*, no. 2980, referring to Philippi 1986, p. 194 and p. 222; Philippi, Maja: *Die ältesten Nachrichten über soziale Konflikte innerhalb der sächsischen Bevölkerung von Braşov-Kronstadt im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert*. In: *Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde* 19/1 (1976), pp. 46-53, here p. 52.
- 7 *Ub. VI*, no. 3901, also cf. Nussbächer, Gernot: *Aus der Erdbebenchronik des Burzenlandes*. In: *Nussbächer, Gernot: Aus Urkunden und Chroniken. Beiträge zur Siebenbürgischen Heimatkunde*. Bucharest: Kriterion 1981, pp. 30-34, here p. 30 where this event is taken from the annals of the monastery in Melk and in which a differing date is given.
- 8 Cf. Szakály, Ferenc: *Phases of Turco-Hungarian Warfare before the Battle of Mohács (1365–1526)*. In: *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* XXXIII (1979), pp. 63-85, here p. 73.
- 9 Cf. Gündisch, Gustav: *Siebenbürgen in der Türkenabwehr 1395–1526*. In: *Gündisch, Gustav: Aus Geschichte und Kultur der Siebenbürger Sachsen. Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Berichte*. Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau 1987 (*Schriften zur Landeskunde Siebenbürgens* 14), pp. 36-64, here p. 38.
- 10 Gündisch 1987, p. 39; in connection with the events linked to the treaty with Mircea the Elder, Nägler, Thomas: *Die Rumänen und die Siebenbürger Sachsen vom 12. Jahrhundert bis 1848*. Transl. by Isolde Huber and Rolf Maurer. Hermannstadt, Heidelberg: hora 1999, p. 96 mentions an invasion, which does not appear to be verifiable, as far as it is not mentioned either by Gustav Gündisch or anywhere else. The above-mentioned first invasion of Transylvania, which Gustav Gündisch had established as having taken place in 1395, based on a document from 1402, is not mentioned: "In einer Urkunde von der Insel Kreta vom 3. März 1401 wird berichtet, dass gegen Ende des Jahres 1400 ein türkisches Heer, das von einem Beutezug aus Siebenbürgen zurückkehrte, von 'Mircea dem Rumänen' angegriffen und zerstört worden war." *Ibid.* (In a document from the island of Crete from March 3, 1401 it is reported that towards the end of the year 1401 a Turkish army which was returning from a plundering campaign in Transylvania was attacked and wiped out by Mircea the Rumanian.)
- 11 According to Gündisch 1987, p. 40, the "historical tradition [...] has usually only recorded the larger invasions". Such invasions may, among others "also have taken place in the Braşov passes". Gündisch, Gustav: *Die Türkeneinfälle in Siebenbürgen bis zur Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts*. In: *Jb. für die Geschichte Osteuropas* 3/2 (1937), p. 411.
- 12 Nussbächer, Gernot: *Eine Zeit des Friedens und des Gedeihens. Fürst Mircea der Große als Herr der Törzburg*. In: *Karpatenrundschau. Wochenzeitschrift für Gesellschaft – Politik – Kultur* XIX (XXX)/39, 26.09.1986, p. 6.
- 13 Gündisch 1987, p. 40f.
- 14 Philippi 1986, p. 54.
- 15 Gündisch 1987, p. 41; cf. the critical remarks with regard to this in his earlier essay: Gündisch 1937, p. 399f., which he revises in his comments in Gündisch 1987, p. 41, fn. 18.
- 16 Kupelwieser, Leopold: *Die Kämpfe Ungarns mit den Osmanen bis zur Schlacht bei Mohacs 1526*. Vienna, Leipzig: Braumüller 1899, p. 32.
- 17 Gündisch 1987, p. 41.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Philippi 1976, p. 51; M.P. 1986, p. 169f.
- 20 Nussbächer, Gernot: *König Sigismund weil in Kronstadt*. In: *Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen (Ed.): Ost-deutsche Gedenktage 2001/2002. Persönlichkeiten und historische Ereignisse*. Bonn: Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen 2003, pp. 361-366.
- 21 Gündisch 1987, p. 43.
- 22 *Ibid.* In his earlier essay, Gündisch 1937, p. 404, elaborates with regard to a document of 1434 on the idea of a separate invasion in the year 1434, which he previously described as part of the invasion of 1432. For an interpretation of

- the sources and for sources which record the destruction of the town as a result of this invasion cf., e.g. Philippi 1986, p. 60f.
- 23 Gündisch 1987, p. 44, cf. on the other hand Pascu, Ştefan: Der transsilvanische Volksaufstand 1437–1438. Bucharest: Verlag der Akademie der RVR 1964 (Bibliotheca Historica Romaniae 7), p. 51, who mentions this invasion in connection with a revolt in the Burzenland in the same year and also names other invasions which are not further verified.
- 24 Pascu 1964, p. 51f., cf. by referring to the comments in fn. 25.
- 25 Cf. Nussbächer, Gernot: Dokumente aus dem Kronstädter Staatsarchiv über die Türkeneinfälle im Burzenland in der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts. In: Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde 22/1 (1979), pp. 25–30, here p. 27.
- 26 Ibid., see also Gündisch 1987, p. 54.
- 27 Cf. e.g. Ub. VI, no. 3687 and Ub. VII, no. 4280a.
- 28 Cf. e.g. the accounts in Ub. V, no. 2682.
- 29 Gündisch 1987, p. 53f.
- 30 Ibid., p. 54.
- 31 Ibid., p. 44f.
- 32 Ibid., p. 47f.
- 33 Cf. in this context Niedermaier, Paul: Die Rolle der Stadtbefestigungen in der Türkenabwehr. In: Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde 21/1 (1978), pp. 81–87, here p. 85f.; also Muresan, Camil: Der gemeinsame Kampf der Rumänen, Ungarn und Sachsen gegen die Türken unter lancu von Hunedoara. In: Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde 21/1 (1978), p. 25.
- 34 Gündisch 1987, p. 49; Referring to Pall, Francisc: Ştiri noi despre expedițiile turcești din Transilvania în 1438 [Neue Nachrichten über die türkischen Einfälle nach Siebenbürgen 1438]. In: Anuarul Institutului de Istorie din Cluj 1–2 (1958–1959), pp. 9–28, here p. 22.
- 35 Ub. V, no. 2303.
- 36 Cf. Ub. VII, no. 3992.
- 37 Cf. e.g. Ub. VII, no. 4013.
- 38 Ub. V, no. 2317; this document is not mentioned by Gündisch 1987, probably because the fifth volume of the *Urkundenbuch* was in the process of being revised at the time the essay appeared.
- 39 Cf. fn. 11.
- 40 Gündisch 1987, p. 49.
- 41 Cf. e.g. Ub V, no. 2682, 2998, 3211, 3318; Ub. VII, no. 4127.
- 42 Ub.V, no. 2469, 2472.
- 43 Ub.V, no. 2663.
- 44 Cf. e.g. Ub V, no. 3030.
- 45 Ub. VII, no. 4252, 4253.
- 46 Cf. e.g. Ub. V, no. 2901.
- 47 Ub. V, no. 2901, 2984.
- 48 Ub. VII, no. 4103, cf. in this connection also the comments therein regarding the handwriting of the document itself.
- 49 Ub. VII, no. 4054.
- 50 Cf. e.g. Ub. V, no. 2767.
- 51 Cf. e.g. Ub. VII, no. 4004, 4208.
- 52 Cf. Ub. no. 4059.
- 53 Cf. e.g. Ub. V, no. 3038, in which he reiterates this right.
- 54 Ub. V, no. 3040.
- 55 Ub. VI, no. 3976.
- 56 Ub. VI, no. 3237.
- 57 Ub. VI, no. 3915.
- 58 Cf. Ub VII, no. 4223.
- 59 Cf. e.g. Ub.VII, no. 4211.
- 60 Cf. Ub.VII, no. 4096.
- 61 Ub. VII, no. 4119, 4120.
- 62 Cf. Ub. VI, no. 3198.
- 63 Ub. VI, no. 3215.
- 64 Cf. e.g. Ub. VII, no. 4256, 4308.
- 65 Ub. V no. 2692.
- 66 Ub. V, no. 2718.
- 67 Ub. VII, no. 3993.
- 68 Cf. Ub. V, no. 2832.
- 69 Ub. VI, no. 3251.
- 70 Ub. V, no. 3025, as well as Ub. VI, no 3158, 3330, cf. also Ub. VII, no. 4141.
- 71 Ub. VII, no. 4226.
- 72 Ub. VI, no. 3564, 3838.
- 73 Ub. VI, no. 3879.
- 74 Cf. Ub. VII, no. 4315.
- 75 Ub. VII, no. 4132.
- 76 Ub. V, no. 2332, no. 2371, no. 2372.
- 77 Ub. V, no. 2907.

- 78 Cf. Gündisch 1987, p. 41; cf. for the 14<sup>th</sup> century Nussbächer, Gernot: Die mittelalterlichen Befestigungsanlagen Kronstadts. In: Roth, Harald (Ed.): Kronstadt. Eine siebenbürgische Stadtgeschichte. Munich: Universitas 1999, pp. 137-149, here p. 138; and Philippi 1986, p. 49f.
- 79 Niedermaier 1978, p. 81f.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Ibid., p. 82.
- 82 Ibid., p. 83. Cf. also Niedermeier, Paul: Siebenbürgische Städte. Forschungen zur städtebaulichen und architektonischen Entwicklung von Handwerksorten zwischen dem 12. und 16. Jahrhundert. Bucharest: Kriterion 1979, p. 147.
- 83 Nussbächer 1999, p. 139.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Cf. Ub. V, no. 2995.
- 86 Ub. V, no. 2966.
- 87 Cf. Niedermeier 1978, p. 83.
- 88 Philippi 1986, p. 97.
- 89 Ub. V, no. 2451.
- 90 Cf. also Philippi 1986, p. 172, where this is translated as "Bohemian wagon-fortress".
- 91 Ub. V, no. 2663.
- 92 Cf. Ub. V, no. 2461.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Ibid., cf. also Philippi 1986, p. 172.
- 95 Ub. V, no. 2451.
- 96 Philippi 1986, p. 173.
- 97 Cf. Ub. VI, no. 3896.
- 98 Philippi 1986, p. 173f.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 Cf. esp. Ub. V, no. 2740.
- 101 Ub. V, no. 2609, 2610.
- 102 Cf. Ub. V, no. 2503.
- 103 Cf. esp. Ub. VII, no. 4287.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Ub. VII, no. 4095; for the second, less probable, dating of the document cf. the notes on Ub. VII, no. 4095, 4096.
- 106 Ub. V, no. 2838.
- 107 Ub. V, no. 2910.
- 108 Ub. V, no. 2522.
- 109 Ub. V, no. 2766.
- 110 Cf. Ub. V, no. 2767.
- 111 Ub. V, no. 3032, 3034.
- 112 Ub. VII, no. 4060.
- 113 Ub. VII, no. 4061.
- 114 Ub. VIII, no. 4090.
- 115 Ub. VI, no. 3342, 3375, 3384, as well as no. 3779.
- 116 As in Ub. VII, no. 4155, 4288.
- 117 Ub. VII, no. 4148.
- 118 Ub. V, no. 2698, 2709, as well as Ub. VII, no. 4029, 4041, 4052.
- 119 Ub. V, no. 2498.
- 120 Ub. VI, no. 3840.
- 121 Ub. 7, no. 4300, 4302, 4311, 4317.
- 122 Ub. VII, no. 4301, 4302.
- 123 Ub. VII, no. 4300, 4311.
- 124 Ub. VII, no. 4315.
- 125 Gündisch 1987, p. 55.
- 126 Ibid, p. 56f.
- 127 Ub. VII, no. 4317, 4318, 4319; cf. also no. 4320.
- 128 Ub. VII, no. 4326.
- 129 Gündisch 1987, p. 57f.
- 130 Ibid., p. 58.
- 131 Ibid.
- 132 Wagner, Ernst: Quellen zur Geschichte der Siebenbürger Sachsen 1191–1975. Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau 1981 (Schriften zur Landeskunde Siebenbürgens 1), pp. 91-94.
- 133 Cf. for the period of 1438–1479 e.g. Ub. V, no. 2892, 2911, 29229, Ub. VI, no. 3490, 3491, 3531, 3532, 3608, 3619, 3687, 3756, 3802, 3826, 3843.
- 134 Gündisch 1987, pp. 58.
- 135 Ibid., p. 60.
- 136 Ibid.
- 137 Ibid.
- 138 Other counts lead to a higher figure for invasions verifiable in the sources, cf. e.g. Wagner, Ernst: Geschichte der Siebenbürger Sachsen. Ein Überblick. Thaur near Innsbruck: Wort und Welt 1990, p. 41; also Schenk, Annemie: Deutsche in Siebenbürgen, Ihre Geschichte und Kultur. Munich: Beck 1992, p. 44.



## **Braşov (Kronstadt) in the Defence against the Turks (1438–1479)**

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Markus Peter Beham received his Master's degree in History at the Institute of East European History of the University of Vienna. As a thesis he undertook a document study regarding the effects of Ottoman threat on the Transylvanian town of Braşov (Kronstadt) from 1438 to 1479 on which a large part of this article is also based. He has given talks on the subject in Germany, Austria and Romania. Up until now he has been working as a tutor for Statistics and Quantification for Historians at the University of Vienna, for Christoph Augustynowicz among others. Currently he is finishing a Law degree at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki as well as starting work on his PhD thesis at the University of Vienna under the guidance of Oliver Jens Schmitt. The subject lies within contemporary History regarding Romanian Elites.

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