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Oradea in the mirror of ottoman chronicles: anthropological perspectives on a border space (15th-17th centuries)

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Oradea în oglinda cronicilor otomane: perspective antropologice asupra unui spațiu de frontieră (secolele XV-XVII). Lucrarea prezintă perspectiva cronicilor otomane asupra unor aspecte legate de cetatea și orașul Oradea în secolele XV-XVII, cu accent pe aspecte sociale și demografice, economice și religioase. Cronicile descriu orașul ca un centru prosper, cu o structură urbană bine organizată, formată din mai multe „varoșuri" (cartiere), și o economie prosperă. Populația era eterogenă, iar relațiile interetnice erau tensionate. Cronicile, deși propagandistice, oferă o perspectivă valoroasă asupra istoriei și societății Oradiei..

Cuvinte-cheie: surse istorice, structuri sociale și demografice, structuri urbane, relații interetnice, economie, viață religioasă.

Introduction

Oradea, although it had lost some of its Renaissance splendor, was still a fairly extensive and prosperous settlement in the 16th and 17th centuries, developed around the fortress located between the Criș and Peța rivers. Of course, political and religious events changed its destiny, transforming it from an important episcopal seat into a border point.

In the context of the formation of the Christian League in 1594, the Transylvanian nobility was divided into two camps, one led by Sigismund Báthory, with an anti-Ottoman orientation, and the other, favorable to the Ottomans, supported by Balthazar Báthory. Domestically, the Protestant Reformation led to tensions between the city's inhabitants and Sigismund Báthory, especially due to the presence of the Jesuits. After his abdication in favor of his wife, the Jesuits were forced to leave Oradea, but Sigismund's reinstatement in August 1598 fueled the distrust of the population, who refused to take the oath of allegiance to him.

But the biggest problem was the pressing and continuous threat of the Ottomans, which forced the adaptation of the fortress to the strategic military requirements of the time, which led, from the second half of the century, to the start of extensive fortification works. There was a well-founded fear that the Ottoman Empire was planning a siege of Oradea, especially since after the Battle of Mohács in 1526, the Pashalik of Buda (1541) and then that of Timișoara (1552) had been established.

To consolidate and modernize the defensive system of the Oradea fortress, Italian architects specialized in fortifications were brought in, who designed a bastion-type ensemble with a pentagonal plan, equipped with five bastions. In the period 1569-1570, under the leadership of Ioan Sigismund, the Crăișorul bastion was built, and the works on the Ciunt bastion were initiated and continued later during the reigns of Stephen, Christopher and Sigismund Báthory. In 1572, the construction of the Aurit bastion was completed, followed in 1584 by the Roșu bastion, as well as the Pământ and Portii bastions.

In 1581, by order of Stephen Báthory, the Italian architect Dominico Ridolfini was appointed to reconfigure the functionality of the church inside the fortress, so that the lower level of the building was transformed into an ammunition depot, the upper level was adapted to serve as a firing point for artillery. At the time of the Ottoman siege in 1598, the fortress had five bastions, one of which was still unfinished, having been provisionally erected in a palanquin system. In his accounts, the architect Marco Isolano, who was in the fortress during the siege, mentions that the bastions were not completely filled with earth, an element that would have been essential for increasing their resistance. He also refers to the presence of a moat with water, a cathedral and a palace with an inner courtyard[1].

Later, by order of Gabriel Bethlen, one of the bastions was rebuilt in brick, thus resulting in the fifth bastion, later called the Bethlen Bastion. Among the Italian architects who contributed to the design and construction of the defensive system adapted to new war strategies and military technological advances are Pietro Ferrabosco, Ottavio Baldigara, Simoné della Genga and Dominico Ridolfini[2].

At the end of the 16th century, the fortress was directly threatened, when in 1598, under the command of Satırcı Mehmed Pasha, the Ottomans, allied with the Tatar armies, organized a military expedition to Transylvania, targeting Oradea, due to its strategic position. Providence (heavy rains and floods) forced the Ottomans to abandon the siege[3].

The shameful failure was not forgotten, the Ottomans later resuming their plans, they returned in 1660, this time managing to conquer the fortress and establishing the Eyalet of Oradea here until 1692, when the Habsburgs put an end to Ottoman domination, the city becoming an integral part of the defensive system of the Habsburg Empire.

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1 Doru Marta. *Cetatea Oradiei de la începuturi până la sfârșitul secolului al XVII-lea*. Oradea: Muzeul Țării Crișurilor, 2013, p. 53.

2 Laura Ardelean. *A Brief Presentation of the Situation in the City of Oradea on the Eve of the Ottoman Siege in 1598*. In: *International scientific conference Topical issues of social science under martial law in Ukraine: conference proceedings (March 27–28, 2024 Oradea, Rumunia)*. Riga. Latvia: Baltija Publishing, 2024, pp. 17-18; Laura Ardelean, Iulia Vaisărhofer. Însemnări în cronici otomane de secolele XVI-XVII privind cetatea Oradea și împrejurimile. Abordare istoriografică cantitativ-calitativă. In: *Crisia*. Oradea: Muzeul Țării Crișurilor, 2024. LIV, pp. 139-148.

3 See Liviu Borcea. Contribuții la istoria politică a Bihorului în epoca lui Mihai Viteazul (1598-1696). In: *Crisia*. Oradea: Muzeul Țării Crișurilor, 1975. V. p. 107 and Doru Marta. *Cetatea Oradiei...*, p. 49.

Methodology

The Ottoman historical sources constitute a documentary corpus of considerable significance, providing essential information about the fortresses and settlements in Transylvania and Hungary. The identification and publication of these sources have led to a diversification of approaches within scientific research, facilitating multiple interpretations of specific historical periods and events. Military reports and journals, alongside diplomatic correspondence, offer relevant data regarding the unfolding of conflicts, offensive and defensive systems, strategies, as well as insights into communication networks, distances between strategic points, the geographical positioning of certain locations, and aspects related to climate and meteorological conditions.

Furthermore, legislation and documents pertaining to fiscal obligations and the duties imposed on the inhabitants of fortresses and adjacent villages provide a valuable perspective on the economic and demographic context of the era. The official Ottoman registers, known as *defter*, encompass fiscal records and essential administrative information. Additionally, legal disputes, donation documents, and other official acts contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the economic landscape of the period under analysis.

A fundamental role in reconstructing historical realities is played by Ottoman chronicles and travel journals. However, these sources must be subjected to rigorous critical analysis, as the accuracy of the information is influenced by the identity of the author and their degree of familiarity with the region being described. The present study focuses on this type of source, aiming to identify references to Oradea, particularly to its fortress and the settlements in its surrounding areas. By examining these accounts, the research seeks to shed light on the historical and spatial dynamics of the region during the period under investigation.

Under the aforementioned circumstances, it is not surprising that Oradea, particularly its fortress, captured the attention of Ottoman chroniclers and travelers. We have access to three volumes of Ottoman documents from the 15th and 17th centuries, translated and published in Romanian[4], which contain passages that will undergo detailed analysis. The aim is to classify the information from the perspective of cultural anthropology. The study prioritizes Turkish chronicles from the 15th to 17th centuries, which provide insights not only into military and political events, but also into daily life, customs, beliefs, and social relations in Oradea. In this regard, the research examines how Ottoman chroniclers perceived and interpreted local culture and identity, the interactions between the Ottoman Empire and its territories of influence, as well as the Ottoman perception of the "other", in this case, the population of Oradea and its surroundings. This approach seeks to uncover the multifaceted dynamics of cultural exchange and identity construction during the period under study.

[4] Mihail Guboglu, Mustafa Mehmet. *Cronici turcești privind Țările Române.* București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1966, I; Mihail Guboglu. *Cronici turcești privind Țările Române*, București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1974. II; Mustafa A. Mehmet. *Cronici turcești privind Țările Române*. București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1980. III.

This methodological approach, however, entails several challenges, as the majority of details in Ottoman writings predominantly emphasize defensive and strategic military aspects. Notably, a significant portion of the information is repetitive, indicating that texts were often borrowed and adapted from earlier sources. Despite this, new elements have also been identified, likely stemming from personal experiences or accounts provided by individuals with whom the Ottoman authors interacted over time—whether Turks who had visited the Romanian Principalities or individuals who traveled to Istanbul for various purposes. These unique elements provide valuable insights into the experiences and interactions that shaped Ottoman narratives, thereby enriching our understanding of the historical context and the perspectives of the authors. While the limitations of these sources are evident, they remain indispensable for reconstructing the complex realities of the period.

The analysis here does not focus on the description of conflicts or political issues. Instead, it has been expanded to emphasize social, demographic, economic, and religious aspects, aiming to highlight how the various religious denominations in Oradea were perceived and described, the daily activities of its inhabitants, and the interactions among different ethnic groups as interpreted by Ottoman chroniclers from the 15th to 17th centuries. The tone of these documents is often propagandistic and triumphalist, exaggerating the merits of the Ottoman armies in conquering such an important fortress while portraying their adversaries as weak, powerless, incapable of resistance, and even faithless. Furthermore, the fortress is described as being "filled with all kinds of giaours [infidels – our addition] and unworthy vagrants, cleansed, with churches and houses of prayer transformed into mosques and prayer halls..."[5], actions framed as morally justified against a population they despised and from whom they sought religious separation. The wealth of the city is used to justify acts of plunder and pillage. Nevertheless, regardless of the chroniclers' motivations or their tendency toward exaggerated justifications, their writings remain significant historical sources for constructing a clearer and more nuanced understanding of the society in the Romanian Principalities during the 15th to 17th centuries.

Regarding the communities within the fortress of Oradea, the city that developed around it, as well as the surrounding settlements, the following aspects related to the city are highlighted: its geo-strategic position, details about its urban structure, social and demographic composition, economic life, and the religious practices of its population. These elements collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of Oradea's historical significance and its role within the broader regional context during the period under examination.

Strategic position and significance. Urban structure

Aşık Paşa-Zâde, the author of the chronicle *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, one of the most valuable sources for the early history of the Ottoman Empire, recounts the expedition

[5] Mehmed Halifa. In: Mihail Guboglu. *Cronici...*, p. 200.

along the Danube led by Mihaloglu Ali Bey, the beylerbey of the Danube and commander of the akıncıs (raiders). According to the chronicler, when Ali Bey arrived from the fortress of Pojon (Bratislava), "on the sixth day, he reached the waters of the Criș (Kiriș) River, marking the first entry of the akıncıs into that flowing river. In that vilayet, the fortunate maiden had just joined hands with the groom tested in holy war... Advancing another two days on horses swift as a torrent, they ravaged and devastated the lands in their path, and with plundering hands, they inflicted great damage upon that region. On the eighth day, they launched an incursion into the city known as **Varat** [...] That city was a renowned passageway into the flourishing Hungarian vilayet."[6] In this context, Oradea is perceived as an essential transit point between various regions of Central Europe and the Ottoman Empire. It is likely that the attackers came from the southern route, from Serbia and Banat, rather than from the west, as the author suggests in this case. His presence in Bratislava is not attested, but it is known that he conducted raids in areas close to it, though around 1476. If we consider that he came from Arad, they could have first crossed the Black Criș River, then covered the distance to Oradea in two days.

The chronicler Orudj bin Adil, referring to the events of 1473-1474, when the Ottomans sought to consolidate and expand their control along the entire Danube line, also describes how "...Mihaloglu Ali Bey, gathering 7,000 akıncıs, entered the Hungarian vilayet. There were two rivers there called the Criș (Kirif). The Turk had not crossed those waters before. He crossed them. Beyond lay the great city under Hungarian rule, called **Varat**. This, being a seat of residence, was a very large city..."[7] The term "seat of residence" suggests the existence of a local administration or a political and military elite that governed the city. Oradea is described as a large and significant city within the Hungarian Kingdom, located beyond the waters of the Criș Rivers (Kirif), which the Turks had not crossed until that time.

In his panegyric, glorifying the achievements of Mihaloglu Ali Bey, whose secretary he appears to have been, accompanying him in this capacity on several campaigns, Suzi Çelebi, originally from Prizren, writes: "He caused the city of **Varad** to be plundered..."[8]

Less well-known, the chronicler Mustafa Gelalzade recounts events that led to the conquest of several fortresses. Attacks were also directed against Oradea: "On the other hand, the akıncıs were sent to the areas between the river called Mureș and the fortresses of Oradea (**Varade**) and Solnoc (Selton), which belonged to the vilayet of Transylvania."[9] Thus, it refers to an Ottoman incursion carried out between the Mureș River and the region of Crișana, which was considered a strategic area for the Ottomans, serving as a transitional zone between the occupied territories and those still under Habsburg or Hungarian noblemen control.

The *Tarih* of Ibrahim Pecevi, one of the most significant Turkish chroniclers of the 17th century, describes the siege of the fortress of Oradea in 1598. Oradea is

6 Aşîk-Paşa-Zade. *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*. In: Mihail Guboglu, Mustafa Mehmet. *Cronici...*, p. 208.
7 Orudj Bin Abil. *Cronica Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*. In: *Ibidem*, pp. 60-61.
8 Suzi Çelebi. *Gazavât-Nâme-I Mihaloglu Ali Bey*. In: *Ibidem*, p. 145.
9 Mustafa Gelalzade. In: *Ibidem*, p. 287.

depicted as having "seven *varoș*", each considered a city in its own right[10], suggesting a fragmented urban model composed of multiple settlements (the term *varoș* in Hungarian means town, derived from *vár*, meaning fortress). Each of these settlements likely had its own identity and function, with a degree of local autonomy.

Under the name *Varad*, the city is also mentioned by chroniclers such as Mehemed bin Mehmed[11], who was present at the 1598 siege of the fortress of Oradea[12], Kara-Celebi-Zade[13], Kiatip Celebi[14], Mustafa Naima[15] and Mehmed Rașid[16], the name Varat appears in the works of Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi[17], Hasan Vegihi[18], Silahdar Fîndîklîlî Mehmed Aga[19].

In Ottoman chronicles from the 15th to the 17th centuries, Oradea is referred to as *Varat*, *Varad*, or *Varade*, which represent the Ottoman adaptation of the Hungarian name *Várad*, regardless of the context in which references to the fortress are made.

In terms of organization, Turkish chroniclers accurately observe that a large city developed around the fortress, and in the adjacent area, settlements emerged and evolved over time, to the extent that they could be considered small towns. These settlements functioned somewhat like districts, though they were not administratively unified at the time the Turkish chroniclers recorded them in their writings.

During the organized expeditions, particularly those of 1598 (unsuccessful) and 1660 (successful), Ottoman texts provide geographical details of significant interest. Of particular relevance here is the importance and positioning of the fortress of Oradea, both in terms of its physical location and its relation to other places.

Mehemed bin Mehmed, describing the Ottoman expedition against Transylvania, provides some details about Oradea: "The aforementioned fortress of Oradea, situated between Transylvania and the Austrian territories, was a strong fortress, and in its vicinity were settlements (*varoș*)."[20] Thus, Oradea was a fortified fortress located in a strategic position, serving as an important border point, a location that granted it military significance in the face of increasingly frequent and organized attacks by Ottoman armies. This image persists, as it is found in the chronicles of both the 16th and 17th centuries. The importance of Oradea is often emphasized, being regarded as a significant fortress in the context of Ottoman expeditions into Transylvania, situated on the main access route to the region. This is also reflected in the writings of Kâtip Çelebi, who, in addition to detailing the discussions regard-

10 Ibrahim Pecevi. *Târîh-i Peçevi*. In: *Ibidem*, pp. 507-510.
11 Mehemed Bin Mehmed. Nuhbet-ut-tevarih ve l-ahbar. In: *Ibidem*, p. 427.
12 Doru Marta. Aspectele ale istoriei medievale a Bihorului văzută prin cetățile sale. In: *Istoria Bihorului. Civilizație – Societate – Economie – Mentalități*. Coord. Gabriel Moisa, Sorin Șipoș, Aurel Chiriac, Radu Romînașu. Oradea: Muzeul Țării Crișurilor, 2018, p. 355.
13 Kara-Celebi-Zade. Ravdat ül-ebrar. In: Mihail Guboglu, Mustafa Mehmet, *Cronici…*, p. 553.
14 Kiatip Celebi. Fezleke-i tarih. In: Mihail Guboglu, *Cronici…*, p. 50, 52.
15 Mustafa Naima. Naima Tarihi. In: Mustafa A. Mehmet, *Cronici…*, p. 23. (The chronicler also uses the term "Varat".)
16 Mehmed Rașid. Tahid. In: *Ibidem*, p. 173. (The chronicler also uses the term "Varat".)
17 Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi. Tarih. In Mihail Guboglu, *Cronici…*, p. 160.
18 Hasan Vegihi. Tarih-i Vegihi. In: *Ibidem*, p. 183.
19 Silahdar Fîndîklîlî Mehmed Aga. Silahdar tarihi. In: *Ibidem*, p. 401.
20 Mehemed Bin Mehmed. *Op.cit.*, p. 427.

ing the routes of the expeditions, reveals the reason why the fortress became a target of military actions: "apart from Oradea, there is no other route through which the Islamic army could penetrate into Transylvania". The journey involved "great difficulty crossing several rivers and large marshes" to reach the fortress, which was situated on a plain. "The aforementioned fortress was located between Transylvania and Austria (Nemce), a strong fortress surrounded by a town (*varoș*)..."[21] The same information regarding the preparations and the expedition of Satırcı Mehmed Pasha against Oradea also appears in the chronicle of Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi[22]. Müneccimbaşı, recounting the siege of 1660, states in his chronicle that "they all set out and advanced toward the fortress of Oradea in the territories of Transylvania. The aforementioned fortress is located at a distance of 15 hours from Ineu."[23] This information, crucial for the army stationed in the aforementioned locality, which had already been conquered, is also found in the writings of Silahdar Fîndıklılı Mehmed Aga: "After encamping for another week near the fortress of Ineu, they advanced toward the fortress called Oradea (Varat), one of the fortresses of Transylvania, located a distance (menzil) of 15 hours from Ineu". The author notes that Oradea was situated in the middle of a marsh, thus having a strong chance of withstanding a prolonged siege[24]. According to Kiatip Celebi's chronicle, the distance from Gyula to Oradea was covered in three days[25].

Regarding the descriptions related to the appearance of the city, particularly the areas in the immediate vicinity of the fortress, it is noteworthy that the chroniclers emphasized the size of the settlement, the resilience and durability of the houses, and the extent and appearance of the gardens.

Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi, highlighting the expanse of the settlement and providing details about the city's appearance, writes: "The *varoș* of the aforementioned fortress is so extensive that twenty thousand men could take refuge there. In addition to its *varoș*, its stone houses extended almost as far as the city itself [...] The houses of the city, being built of stone and brick, eliminated the need for additional fortifications for the beylerbey".[26] The city "had a pleasant and healthy climate, being fortified like the Elburuz mountains."

Hasan Vegihi also gives us details about the city and its climate: "It had a pleasant climate, healthy people and a very strong and fortified city with large stone towers that rose to the sky, half of it being on a large river"[27]. This is the Crișul Repede River.

Interesting is the assessment of Mustafa Naima, who in his accounts of the siege of the Oradea fortress in 1598 used as a source the chronicle *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, attributed to Topcular Kâtibi Abdul Kadir Efend, a chronicler who in 1595

[21] Kiatip Celebi. *Op.cit.*, p. 52.
[22] Mehemed Bin Mehmed. *Op.cit.*, p. 427.
[23] Müneggimbaşî. Sahaif ül-Ahbar. In: Mihail Guboglu, *Cronici...*, p. 274.
[24] Silahdar Fîndîklîlî Mehmed Aga. *Op.cit.*, p. 401
[25] Kiatip Celebi. *Op. cit.*, p. 54.
[26] Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi. *Op. cit.*, p. 160-162.
[27] Hasan Vegihi. *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

held the position of "secretary of the artillerymen"[28]. The chronicler locates the fortress, between Transylvania and Austria, which was "a fortified fortress and, all around, had houses (*varoș*)". Furthermore, he estimates that: "From the city to the vineyards, the houses and dwellings stretched outward, about as far as the wall of Constantinople and as far as the garden of the Davud-Pașa menzil."[29] At a general estimation, about 5-10 km. Further, it appears that the city has solid stone constructions: "on the first day of Monday rebi-ul-evvel - it was Friday - they entered the solid stone and decorated houses of the city"[30].

Over time, the fortress belonged to the Hungarian Kingdom, then to the Ottoman Empire, and then to the Habsburgs. Therefore, the chronicles present the administrative situation depending on the period in which they were written.

From the Ottoman chronicles from the 15th to 17th centuries it appears that Oradea had a strong fortress, having an important role in the conflicts between the Ottomans and the neighboring kingdoms. Although the writings focus more on geostrategic aspects, references can be identified to the urban organization, the structure of the city and the settlements around the fortress.

Social structure, demographic structure and interethnic relations

The social and demographic structure of Oradea reflected in the Turkish chronicles is diverse. The inhabitants are mentioned in almost all cases when sieges are referred to. In addition to those who played a role in the defense of the fortress, i.e. the military population, those who fled or suffered from military conflicts are also mentioned, i.e. the civilian population, especially the elderly, women, young people and children: "They arrived there unexpectedly, like a mountain torrent, at dawn, while the giaors of that land were sleeping carelessly and knew nothing. Wave after wave, the Akinci, surrounding the city, surrounded it like a belt (*kemer*) and confused the women, children, young and old people in it"[31]. The Ottoman attack caused chaos and panic among the population, which was vulnerable to invasions. Many tried to save their wealth and flee: the "inhabitants of the «*varoș*» preferred to flee, some of them even loaded themselves into carts (*haraba*), and others were ready to leave"[32].

From an ethnic point of view, "those of Hungarian descent lived in communes and villages"[33]. The mention of villages indicates a rural population around the city. There were also communities of Austrians and other ethnic groups, who played a role in the defense and administration of the city. "The Austrians had also taken the Hungarians under their rule, regardless of whether they wanted them or not"[34]. There are no direct references to the Romanian population, but although

[28] Cristina Rotman. Un izvor inedit referitor la istoria orașului Tîrgoviște în anul 1595. Cronica lui Topcular Kâtibi Abdul Kadir Efendi. In: *Arhiva Valachica. Studii și materiale de istorie și istorie a culturii*. București: 1976, pp. 239-240.
[29] Mustafa Naima. *Op. cit.*, p. 25.
[30] *Ibidem.*
[31] Aşîk-Paşa-Zade. *Op.cit.*, p. 208.
[32] Ibrahim Pecevi. *Op.cit.*, p. 508.
[33] Kiatip Celebi. *Op.cit.*, p. 52.
[34] Kara-Celebi-Zade. *Op.cit.*, p. 554.

the previously mentioned fragment refers mainly to Hungarians, the mention of villages suggests the presence of other ethnic groups, including Romanians, who were known as inhabitants of the rural areas of Transylvania.

Regarding the population, the chronicles use the pejorative term *giaor*, meaning in their perception, unbelievers or infidels, but which referred to the Christian population: "The unfortunate giaors, assuming that the taking of the city by the Islamic army, which was advancing step by step, was certain and determined, were forced to ask for aman, in order to save their lives"[35]. The local population, mostly Christian, was forced to negotiate for survival. Mehmed Halifa mentions that: "The aforementioned fortress, which was full of all sorts of giaors and unworthy strays, was cleansed, and the churches and houses of prayer were transformed into mosques and mosques"[36]. The giaors being in this case Christians, if there are several "sorts", it follows that they can be Reformed, Catholic, but also Orthodox, so it could also be Romanians. However, we emphasize that we have no direct mentions, but only indirect indications that suggest their presence in the ethnic structure of the region.

We have some data on the size of the city, considered large, and its capacity to host a significant population (20,000 people). The urban society was well organized, with an infrastructure capable of supporting a certain number of inhabitants: "The *varoș* of the aforementioned fortress is so large that twenty thousand people can be reinforced there"[37]. The mention of "reinforcement" indicates the existence of defensive structures and a social organization capable of dealing with external threats.

References have been made previously regarding the extent of the settlement. Of course, we can think that the size of the city and the "*varoș"* is influenced by the population density, from which we deduce a considerable number of inhabitants in Oradea, especially in the 16th -17th centuries.

Of course, demographic changes occurred as a result of the sieges. A 15th - century source mentions: "Taking the pendjik of 32,000 prisoners, they sent it to Sultan Mehmed"[38]. The figure of 32,000 prisoners suggests a significant population around Oradea, involving not only the city itself but also the surrounding villages. The forced capture of the civilian population, including men, women and children, was a regular practice among the Turks.

From another fragment of the chronicler Mehmed Raşid we deduce the losses from the siege that took place in 1660: "The three thousand people, that still remained, both wounded and injure free, out of nine thousand renowned soldiers, who were besieged at the beginning, emptied the fortress and descended onto the plain in front of the fortress"[39]. The considerable reduction in the number of defenders from 9,000 to 3,000 men indicates a devastating impact on the social

35 Müneggimbaşî. *Op.cit.,* p. 274.
36 Mehmed Halifa. In: Mihail Guboglu, *Cronici…*, p. 200.
37 Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi. *Op.cit.,* p.162.
38 Orudj Bin Abil. *Op. cit.,* p. 61.
39 Mehmed Raşid. *Op. cit.,* p. 174

structure of the city, taking into account the fact that part of the population managed to flee. Others were captured and taken prisoner.

The Ottoman chronicles reveal a picture of a multi-ethnic society in the case of Oradea, which had to navigate between collaboration and conflict in the context of the changes that took place in the 15th-17th centuries. Interethnic relations were influenced by political, religious and military factors, such as Austrian domination, Ottoman invasions, as well as religious transformations that created a real rift within the society.

Some fragments reflect the tensions between the Hungarians and the Austrians. Mehmed bin Mehmed mentions that, before the arrival of the Ottomans, Oradea was under "German rule" and that the Austrians considered the city a strategic point for the defense of Christendom: "The German king said: The Hungarian garrison is not able to guard the fortress alone, and, the fortress above being the key and pride of the borders of our country, it is possible that the army of the Ottoman family will come upon it."[40] The lack of trust and rivalry between the two ethnic groups is evident, especially when the Austrians began to expand their influence in the Kingdom of Hungary, provoking resistance from the Hungarians. However, the Austrians go on the attack: "Previously, several thousand Austrian soldiers had entered the fortress, and for several years they had become a nuisance"[41]. The Hungarians lived in communes and villages, as mentioned earlier. The dominance of the Austrians is clear in the following passage: "The Austrians had taken the Hungarians under their rule, regardless of whether they wanted them or not. Their persecution had exceeded all measure, and thus they weakened them in their oppressive hands. At the beginning of this year, all of them uniting, they (the Hungarians) brought to the residence of the Sultan of the world the gift of their submission, desiring to be named lord by the Sultan as ruler, Stephen Bocskai, and their request was granted"[42]. Here is a pro-Ottoman perspective, emphasizing the suffering of the Hungarians under the Austrians and the "savior" role of the Sultan.

The tense relations even resulted in armed conflicts. "On the twenty-seventh day of Gemazi ul-Evvel, in the year mentioned above, the two enemies, the Austrians and the Hungarians, met and fought fiercely."[43] Another violent conflict is described as "Bocskai, besides killing all the Germans inside, also destroyed a group of them (the Austrians), killing several Germans there afterwards"[44]. The fact that the Hungarians allied with the Ottomans against the Austrians indicates a complex politics of alliances and rivalries between different ethnic and political groups. Tensions between the Hungarians and the Austrians weakened common resistance against the Ottomans, so the Ottomans, taking advantage of the situation, consolidated their control over the region.

40 Mehemed Bin Mehmed. *Op. cit.*, p. 428.
41 Mustafa Naima. *Op. cit.*, p. 25.
42 Kara-Celebi-Zade. *Op. cit.*, p. 553.
43 Kiatip Celebi. *Op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.
44 *Ibidem*.

Economic life

The city had a prosperous economy, with fairs and an active commercial network before the Ottoman conquest. After 1660, Oradea was integrated into the Ottoman Empire, becoming the center of a sanjak. Ottoman chroniclers describe Oradea as an important commercial city, with daily bazaars, or markets, where trade took place.

"They consider each «*varoş*» to be a city. Every day of the week a bazaar is held in one of these «*varoş*». It was a very flourishing and rich city. The wealth of the vineyards and gardens in its surroundings is very great and each of them is arranged in such a way that it is impossible to describe them. However, the inhabitants of the «*varoş*» preferred to flee, some of them even left loading themselves into carts (*haraba*), and others were ready to leave. Just then the Islamic army arrived and took much plunder"[45]. As I mentioned before, there is a complex structure, with seven distinct neighborhoods, where both residents and traveling merchants had constant opportunities to sell and buy their goods. Oradea was perceived as a rich city, which deserved to be conquered and plundered. The gardens and vineyards are noted, but also the way in which they are organized. They are so extensive that they are even compared to those of Adrianople: "In addition to its «*varoş*», its stone houses also stretched almost as far as that city. The city of Oradea has beautiful and extensive vineyards and gardens that encompass the cazaua, like the vineyards and gardens of Adrianople. In the surroundings of the city there were so many herds and flocks of cattle that the Islamic army was fed up with mutton, ram and ox meat"[46]. The appreciation from the conquerors' perspective is evident, with the chronicler emphasizing how the loot was used to feed the troops.

In terms of prosperity, the city of Oradea is described in positive terms, sometimes even in superlatives: "It was a mine of silver and jewels, and the virgins were like a treasure trove full of gold. Exploring that land and taking the virgins from there, they devastated it, sweeping away everything in their path and taking the young men and the wealth inside, the land remained deserted, then they set fire to it from the edge"[47]. The text suggests that Oradea was a prosperous city, and the conquerors were not satisfied with just the material rewards, but proceeded to completely destroy the settlement. The virgins are compared to gold, which denotes the high price they usually received for these captives.

The economy of Oradea and the surrounding area was therefore diversified. The inhabitants, in addition to trade, were intensely engaged in gardening and viticulture, but also in herding and animal husbandry.

Obviously, the chronicles also mention inventories related to armaments and other military details, which of course fell into the hands of the Ottomans after the siege of 1660, justifying the fact that for its riches and military arsenal it was worth conquering: "Seven hundred cannons were found inside it. So were many other things in the fortress. There were six fortifications, each of which was fortified and

[45] Ibrahim Pecevi. *Op. cit.*, pp. 508-509.
[46] Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi. *Op. cit.*, p. 161.
[47] Aşîk-Paşa-Zade. *Op. cit.*, p. 208.

strong just like a fortress. In each of these fortifications were found ten baliamezza cannons and two large cannons (*makras*)"[48].

Military conflicts certainly had negative effects on the economy, such as on the supply and inflation of prices for various. "That is why the Tatars had to bring sugar from great distances. A kilo of barley had begun to sell for 3-5 gold coins"[49].

Religious life

The chronicles reveal an image of a Christian society that had to adapt to the political changes of the times, while preserving its religious identity, although the Ottomans resorted to destroying places of worship and replacing them with symbols of the newly established power. The action is also interpreted as a measure that attempts to change religious identity. The contempt for the Christian population is obvious. Considering them inferior, they are often presented as weak, unable to defend themselves ("the giaors, despite all the efforts made, remained powerless and, taking their families and putting them in carriages"[50]), or even completely unprepared ("the giaors from that land slept carelessly and knew nothing"[51]). Muslims are presented in antithesis to Christians: "Many lucky and happy ghazis were fated to be wounded, and others to die as martyrs. And of the unfortunate giaors, many being destroyed, went to hell..."[52]. The Ghazi were Muslims, who if they were wounded or lost their lives on the battlefield meant that they had an honorable destiny, becoming martyrs, and thus privileged, while the Christians had a tragic fate, whose death was in vain. Moreover, they ended up in hell, according to the chronicler, meaning they were eternally condemned. The author of the story continues: "When the magnanimous serdar listened to the pleas of the giaors who asked for mercy, requesting permission that for three days to be allowed to leave the city, and that their lives and property be spared, his feeling of mercy awakened and granted them amman, on condition that they surrender the entire city, with all the ammunition, tools, cannons and rifles in it"[53]. So, the military leader is presented as magnanimous, but we can observe a generosity limited by the imposed conditions, which shows the nature of the negotiation. It was more a matter of strategic maneuver than of real mercy towards those also called in this passage "giaors". The pejorative use of the word when referring to the local population is a regular practice.

The destruction of the city implies a negative impact on daily life and local customs. During the incursions, looting, devastation and possible destruction of buildings are mentioned. It is not directly specified that the churches were demolished, but the descriptions of the burning of the city and the taking of the population into captivity suggest that religious buildings would also have been affected.

48 Mehmed Halifa. In: Mihail Guboglu. *Cronici...*, p. 200.
49 Mustafa Naima. *Op. cit.*, p. 27.
50 Mehemed Bin Mehmed. *Op. cit.*, p. 428.
51 Aşîk-Paşa-Zade. *Op. cit.*, p. 208.
52 Mehmed Halifa. In: Mihail Guboglu. *Cronici...*, pp. 198-199.
53 *Ibidem*, p. 199.

Conclusions

The Ottoman chronicles, although strongly influenced by the propagandistic perspective of the authors, remain valuable tools in the reconstruction of the historical past of the region, of the way in which Oradea and the fortress were perceived by the Turks in the 15th - 17th centuries, considering both the strategic and urban dimension of the city, as well as the social, economic and religious realities of the era.

It appears that Oradea had a major strategic importance, being located at the intersection of trade and military routes essential for the power relations between the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary and, later, the Habsburg Empire. Its fortifications were the subject of extensive transformations, reflecting the need to adapt to the new realities of military conflict, especially in the context of Ottoman expansion. Turkish chroniclers repeatedly emphasize this aspect, giving the city the status of a key point in the confrontations in Central Europe.

Data revealing the urban organization and demographic structure of Oradea highlight a well-developed city, with a network of distinct «*varoş*»/neighborhoods. The city's wealth is praised, but the economy was significantly affected by military conflicts and Ottoman incursions, culminating in its systematic plundering following the siege of 1660.

Socially and ethnically, Ottoman chronicles highlight the existence of a heterogeneous population, consisting of Hungarians, Austrians and, most likely, Romanians, although the latter are not explicitly mentioned. Interethnic relations were marked by a tense dynamic, especially between Austrians and Hungarians, with conflicts between these groups often being instrumentalized by the Ottomans to facilitate their expansion in the region.

The religious dimension also appears in Ottoman sources. The Christian population is frequently described in a derogatory manner, suggesting that they are inferior to Muslims. However, in contradiction, the appearance of the city, the condition of the fortified citadel, and the manner in which gardening, viticulture, and animal husbandry were practiced are appreciated. Through their message, the texts attempt to justify and legitimize the Ottoman military actions in the area.

In conclusion, the Ottoman chronicles offer a valuable, but selective, perspective on the history of Oradea and the region in which it is located. They should be interpreted with caution. However, the analysis of these sources allows for a better understanding of the geopolitical context of the 15th - 17th centuries, as well as the impact that Ottoman expansion had on the social, economic and cultural structures of Oradea and the adjacent regions.