

ECONOMY AND TRADE

MAKING A PROFIT IN SIBIU IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: ORIENTAL GOODS, COMMERCIAL CAPITALS AND BETRAYED FRIENDSHIPS

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Interest in the research of merchants as economic agents of commercial exchange has taken off significantly during the last years, with focus on new regions, new concepts and new factors put forward for understanding the mechanisms which made the “wheels of commerce” (Fernand Braudel) turn¹. In this study, I deal with the activity of merchants found in the written records of Sibiu, particularly customs registers but also in private account books and juridical documents from the sixteenth century. Sibiu was a thriving commercial town attracting particularly oriental goods from the Ottoman Empire and thus the merchants who carried them along the land routes of the Balkan Peninsula into Transylvania. Wallachian traders were also strongly involved in the long-distance trade, and some of the “Greek” merchants registered in the Sibiu archival material were based in the Romanian principality.

I have already discussed in other articles some of the features of Sibiu’s trade in the sixteenth century as well as questions related to the statute of alien merchants in sixteenth century Transylvania and the commercial practices created by commercial exchange. I shall summarise here the main findings of my research so far in order to outline the framework of my current argument.

Trade in Sibiu throughout the sixteenth century fluctuated around an annual value of 20,000 gold florins. A peak was reached in 1553 with a total turnover of goods over 50,000 gold florins, while 1595 saw the lowest value of the trade with 8,000 gold florins². These values are calculated on the 22 customs registers of the town from the years 1500-1597. Oriental trade represented the strongest component of the total commercial traffic, and it comprised textiles, cotton, silk, spices, dried fruits, leather goods, alum and dyestuffs, etc.³

¹ I shall mention here just some recent contributions in this field which are also relevant to my own endeavours: *Merchants, Companies and Trade. Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Sushil Chaudhuri and Michel Morineau, Cambridge, 1999. See also the proceedings of the “Commercial Networks in the Early Modern World” symposium, <http://cadmus.iue.it/dspace/retrieve/935/HEC02-02.pdf>, accessed at 21 April 2005; four out of the five papers are also published in French in *Dossier. Les réseaux marchands à l’époque moderne*, in “*Annales*”, T. 58, 2003, no. 3, p. 569-672; Gheorghe Lazăr, *Les marchands en Valachie, XVII-XVIIIe siècles*, Bucharest, 2006 (in print).

² For the precise figures see Mária Pakucs, *Florini și dinari în registrele vamale ale Sibiului din secolul al XVI-lea. Scurt demers metodologic*, in “*Studii și materiale de istorie medie*” (SMIM), t. XXI, 2003, p. 284, table 2.

³ Mária Pakucs, *Legături comerciale între Orient și Occident. Comerțul de tranzit al Sibiului în veacul al XVI-lea*, in “*Revista istorică*”, t. XV, 2004, no. 1-2, pp. 197-200.

In 1378 and in 1382, the town of Sibiu was granted the privilege of staple right. The wording of the charters issued by King Louis the Great (1342–1382) created a particular staple: foreign merchants were not allowed a retail sale of their goods in Sibiu and were forbidden to travel into Wallachia⁴. A mandatory deposit of the goods or the period of permitted stay in Transylvania were not mentioned *expressis verbis*, although later documentary evidence points to the enforcement of the deposit for the merchants coming from Wallachia with oriental merchandise at Tălmăciu⁵. The right to the staple was upheld in Sibiu until the seventeenth century, when the Greek trading company was established. Until then it represented the main framework in which all commercial transactions between foreign and local merchants took place.

By the end of the fifteenth century, Sibiu started to lease the customs revenues of Turnu Roșu from the Hungarian Kings and then from the Transylvanian princes. The customs registers thus were drawn up by the town's employees and consequently kept in the city archives. As I mentioned earlier, a good series of customs registers survive from the sixteenth century which shall be employed in this study⁶. These customs accounts have different structural compositions, and only the registers from the second half of the century consistently record data concerning the merchants coming from Wallachia and paying the duties of 5% of their goods, in kind. A further particularity of these customs registers is that only merchants carrying oriental goods were recorded with their names, place of departure and amount of goods paid as duties. This was a means of controlling both the traders and the incoming quantities of merchandise that was subsequently sold to the townspeople.

I have also argued elsewhere that despite the fact that foreign merchants were limited in their freedom of movement and choice of business partners once they decided to go to Sibiu, their trade in oriental goods did neither cease nor diminish. In the following section I shall present data from the town's customs registers which will shed a new light on the question of the foreign traders, more precisely of the merchants dealing in oriental goods who were generically called "Greeks" in Transylvanian sources.

The customs registers of Sibiu are laconic in how they record the identity of the merchants, who appear in the registers by name and place of departure. Sometimes, for the sake of precision in cases where names and places of origin are

⁴ The latest editions of these documents are in *Handel und Gewerbe in Hermannstadt und in den Sieben Stühlen 1224–1579*, ed. Monica Vlaicu et al., Sibiu, 2003, doc. 14, pp. 72-73 (1378) and doc. 15, p. 74 (1382).

⁵ See for a more detailed discussion Mária Pakucs Willcocks, "The "Greek" Merchants in the Saxon Transylvanian Towns in the Later Middle Ages and Early Modern Times, in "Historical Yearbook", t. II, 2005, pp. 107-116.

⁶ National Archives of Sibiu, Fondul magistratului orașului și scaunului Sibiu, Inventory 197 – Socoli vamale (hereinafter NAS). The 1500 register is published in *Quellen zur Geschichte Siebenbürgens. Rechnungen aus dem Archiv der Stadt Hermannstadt und der sächsischen Nation*, vol. I, Sibiu, 1889, pp. 270-310 (hereinafter: *Rechnungen*)

the same, merchants are more precisely described by their blood ties or professional affiliations (the son of, the associate of) or by their nicknames ('The Thick', 'The Old', 'The Young', 'Black' and so on). Probably for the sake of unequivocal identification, this practice of referring to another merchant could also be interpreted as a means of strengthening the trader's trustworthiness by association. Very rarely, merchants are identified by an ethnonym, such as in 1578 when the scribes recorded "one Greek from Nikopol", or in 1594 – "some Armenians" (*Etlige Ermener*).

The actual meaning of the location attribute, which is seldom left out, presents an unanswerable question. Samuel Goldenberg himself acknowledged that the preposition *de* or *von* did not indicate the original place of the merchants but rather the last town/locality they had been in before they reached Sibiu⁷. The town of departure was indeed an important element in differentiating persons with identical names when scribes entered them in the customs registers. Furthermore, as we shall see later, "Greek" merchants were based in the Wallachian towns⁸.

Table 1 offers a summary of the number of recorded merchants and the number of consignments brought by southern traders to Sibiu in the sixteenth century.

Table 1: Numbers of merchants and of transports in the oriental trade of Sibiu between 1500–1597

Year	Merchants	Transports	Year	Merchants	Transports
1500	38	52	1585	31	39
1540	45	84	1587	30	37
1550	40	46	1588	24	35
1559	39	36	1591	26	35
1578	24	48	1593	37	55
1579	24	34	1594	46	57
1583	35	52	1595	35	41
			1597	36	55

Fluctuations in the number of merchants involved in Sibiu's oriental trade in subsequent years are significant, especially in the last decade of the sixteenth century. These variations are found in the value of the recorded trade as well. A higher number of merchants is not necessarily equivalent to a rise in the commercial traffic, as opposed to what Snejka Panova believed⁹.

⁷ Samuel Goldenberg, *Der Südhandel in den Zollrechnungen von Sibiu (Hermannstadt) im 16. Jahrhundert*, in RESEE, t. II, no. 3-4, p. 416, note 66.

⁸ See also the argument made by Mihail Dan, Samuel Goldenberg, *Le commerce balkano-levantin de la Transsylvanie au cours de la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle et au début du XVIIe siècle*, in RESEE, 1967, no. 5, pp. 89-91.

⁹ Snejka Panova, *Bălgarskite târgovetzi prez XVII. vek* (Bulgarian merchants in the seventeenth century), Sofia, 1980, p. 62. This author counted 57 transports for the year 1597.

The core of the statistical processing of the Sibiu customs registers concerning the merchants is comprised in Table 2, where transports are ranked according to their value converted into gold florins. By categorising them under the four columns, large transports are considered as those which surpass the value of 1000 florins and small transports those which fall below 100 florins in value.

Table 2: Transports based on their value in gold florins as recorded in the Sibiu customs registers between 1500-1597

Year	under 100 fl.			101-500 fl.			501-1000 fl.			over 1000 fl.		
	A	B	C %	A	B	C %	A	B	C %	A	B	C %
1500	45	843 fl	11.31	4	672 fl	9.01	3	2488 fl	33.37	1	3454 fl	46.32
1540	43	1739 fl	17.35	41	8286 fl	82.65	-	-	-	-	-	-
1550	19	954 fl	10.51	24	4786 fl	52.73	-	-	-	3	3336 fl	36.76
1559	5	290 fl	2.28	22	5288 fl	41.47	8	5506 fl	43.18	1	1667 fl	13.07
1578	25	1205 fl	14.31	20	4583 fl	54.44	2	1564 fl	18.58	1	1067 fl	12.67
1579	12	566 fl	8	19	4070 fl	57.58	3	2433 fl	34.42	-	-	-
1583	30	953 fl	11.98	19	5255 fl	66.05	3	1748 fl	21.97	-	-	-
1585	20	864 fl	14.27	17	3463 fl	57.18	1	712 fl	11.76	1	1017 fl	16.79
1587	13	831 fl	11.26	20	3881 fl	52.6	4	2666 fl	36.14	-	-	-
1588	6	219 fl	2.45	25	6208 fl	69.59	4	2494 fl	27.96	-	-	-
1591	8	406 fl	5.45	25	5710 fl	76.6	2	1338 fl	17.95	-	-	-
1593	18	549 fl	3.34	22	5141 fl	31.27	13	8187 fl	49.8	2	2562 fl	15.59
1594	36	1064 fl	12.06	17	4383 fl	49.68	3	2000 fl	22.67	1	1375 fl	15.59
1595	41	457 fl	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1597	14	584 fl	3.97	31	6996 fl	47.49	9	5964 fl	40.48	1	1188 fl	8.06

A= number of transports; B=the total value of the transports in each category; C=percentage of total value of trade for that year.

Data in Table 2 reveal that the bulk of the trade lay in consignments with values between 101 and 500 gold florins. The exception to the rule is the year 1593, when, despite the unexceptional number of merchants within the secular trend, almost half of the registered oriental trade was brought by merchants with large amounts of goods. For instance, a certain Nikula from Bucharest passed through the customs five times that year with a great variety of goods, none of them in particularly great quantities but the totals amounted all in all to 2,770 gold florins. 1593 is also the year when the value of registered trade doubled compared to previous and following years. Whether this was just an accident because of better control of the customs registration or if a truly 'good' trade year cannot be decided on the basis of the available information. The results for 1595 are striking: all transports consisted of small consignments, and this is also the year when the oriental trade was at its lowest values, while the non-oriental trade fell within the average values of the total trade¹⁰. It is important to underline that the value of transports was calculated on the prices given to the oriental goods in the customs registers. The actual market value of the merchandise is different, therefore these values may be underestimated.

Table 3 shows the maximum, the minimum and the average value of transports for each year.

¹⁰ M. Pakucs, *Legături comerciale*, p. 197, fig. 2.

Table 3: The average, maximum, and minimum value of the recorded transports of oriental goods, in gold florins between 1500-1597

	1500	1540	1550	1559	1578	1579	1583	1585	1587	1588	1591	1593	1594	1595	1597
Average	147	119	197	354	175	208	153	155	199	255	213	298	155	11	268
Maximum	3455	600	1143	1667	1067	961	680	1017	938	742	819	1376	1375	50	1188
Minimum	2	8	5	26	5	26	4	8	20	15	13	2	4	1	8

The number of transports and the total value of the commercial traffic are not closely connected. Years with a higher number of consignments and merchants such as 1540 and 1594 did not bring about a subsequent growth in commercial exchange. Quite the contrary, the average values of the transports for these years rank among the lowest recorded. 1595 is probably the best illustration of this argument: although the number of merchants and transports fits the secular trend, the military disturbances in Wallachia had direct impacts on the values of the transports.

So far I have presented the overall picture of the merchants dealing in oriental goods in Sibiu. The present situation of the available primary sources does not allow a more thorough, prosopographical exploration of the merchants recorded in the Sibiu customs registers. In most cases, their historical existence is only documented in these account books as they can hardly be traced in other historical documents. Medieval Wallachian internal sources, although fully published for this period, are not suitable for accurate identification of individual merchants¹¹.

In the following, two merchants who I think to represent best the examples of the merchants involved in the oriental trade of Sibiu will be introduced to the reader. A closer look will be taken at the kinds and quantities of goods they carried and a profile will be created where other sources exist to corroborate the Sibiu registers.

The most outstanding protagonist among the merchants from the beginning of the sixteenth century is undoubtedly *Dragotă from Argeș*: not only did the value of his transports surpass by far the average mean of the transports from 1500, but he was one of the few merchants who can be traced both in the Sibiu customs registers and in other types of sources as well. Dragotă was probably located in the town of Curtea de Argeș, because this is the way he is mentioned in a contemporary case in connection to the debts that the late merchant Nicolaus Prol from Sibiu owed to several Wallachians¹². Dragotă was recorded in the 1500 Sibiu customs register as having had two transports of oriental goods as well as several other transports in Western manufactured products and Wallachian natural

¹¹ In the indices of the series of Wallachian documents, *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, seria B, Țara Românească, the entry “Greek merchants” appears for the first time in volume V (1551–1565), București, 1983, a chronology which is consistent with the stronger presence of the Greeks in Transylvanian sources.

¹² The documents concerning this litigation are published in Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. XV/1, doc. CCLXXIX-XXXII, pp. 152-155.

products. Radu Manolescu identifies the merchant listed as Dragatha (Dragwtha) with another trader, Demetrius Dragatha¹³, a match which, in my view, is not so evident, since the registers distinctively record the two names: Dragatha with a total of 9 transports and Demetrius Dragatha with 6 transports (with none in oriental trade). Divided in the three components of the trade, the recorded activity of Dragotă in 1500 at the Sibiu customs can be illustrated as follows:

Table 4: The trading activity of Dragotă of Argeş recorded in the 1500 Sibiu customs register

Component of trade	Number of transports	Value of traded goods
Export of Wallachian natural products to Sibiu	3	98 fl.
Import of manufactured products (cloth, iron tools) into Wallachia	4	2,440 fl.
Oriental trade	2	4,200 fl.

Dragotă is recorded as having had transports in both directions on 19 April 1500: once taking fish to Sibiu for 56 florins and once carrying cloth valued at 80 florins into Wallachia. For 2 June 1500, he occupies one separate page in the customs registers with one transport of oriental goods from Wallachia to Sibiu of a total value of 745 florins, and with another transport of 109,000 knives in the opposite direction. Interestingly enough, the writer of the register also mentioned – a fact which is quite exceptional – that Dragotă had bought these knives from “Niclis Prolin”¹⁴. This entry confirms my conjecture that the Dragotha mentioned in the registers is identical with the Dragotă of Argeş named in the juridical documents connected to the unpaid debts of Nicolaus Prol. Dragotă is not recorded in the Braşov customs account of 1503, so he seems to have favoured the town of Sibiu for doing business.

Unfortunately, the activity of the other merchants cannot be followed in a complex way for other years in the sixteenth century. It is only a matter of guesswork that they did take goods into Wallachia in exchange for their oriental goods.

From the second half of the sixteenth century the activities of *Pana from Râmnic* were chosen, first because he was the merchant with the most recorded transports and second because he can be traced in the most registers between 1579-97. The probability that the entries refer to the same person is quite high, because in 1591, a different merchant with the same name is distinctively recorded as “an other one with the name Pana”¹⁵.

¹³ Radu Manolescu, *Relațiile economice ale Țării Românești cu Sibiul la începutul secolului al XVI-lea*, in “Analele Universității C.I. Parhon București”, 1956, no. 7, p. 249.

¹⁴ *Rechnungen*, p. 288.

¹⁵ NAS, Inventory 197, no. 36 (1591), 8v.

The range of merchandise Pana was recorded to have carried to Sibiu is very wide since he traded in practically all the oriental goods: spices, textiles, leather objects, foodstuffs, etc.

Table 5: The trading activity of Pana from Râmnic between 1578-1597

YEAR	VALUE OF TRANSPORTS (IN GOLD FLORINS)					TOTAL (IN GOLD FLORINS)
	1	2	3	4	5	
1578	352 fl.	109 fl.	68 fl.	181 fl.	–	710 fl.
1579	26 fl.	301 fl.	401 fl.	61 fl.	338 fl.	1127 fl.
1583	388 fl.	128 fl.			–	516 fl.
1587	681 fl.	535 fl.			–	1216 fl.
1588	134 fl.	435 fl.			–	569 fl.
1591	135 fl.	115 fl.			–	250 fl.
1593	631 fl.	691 fl.	18 fl.		–	1340 fl.
1597	121 fl.	262 fl.			–	383 fl.
TOTAL						6111 fl.

It is difficult to assess accurately the information presented in Table 5. The variations in the number of transports and their value could be determined by a number of causes, the closest at hand being a fluctuation in the supply of goods Pana was able to buy in Wallachia. It would be interesting to be able to ascertain whether there was a direct connection between the apparently favourable trading conditions in 1593 and the parallel increase in Pana's trading activity. A similar growth in the value of traded goods in that year is identifiable with other recurrent merchants, too, for example, Iwan from Pitești (almost 2000 florins worth of traded goods as compared to the values of 1600 florins in previous years) or Isar from Pitești. In the case of the latter merchant, the difference is more striking since from an average of around 500-600 florins, in 1593 he traded goods worth 1650 florins. Pana from Râmnic is recorded in 1579, 1583, and 1597 also as part of an association of merchants.

In previous arguments I have discussed the extent to which the freedom of movement of these oriental trade merchants was restricted and controlled, and how they kept coming to Sibiu despite the seemingly unfavourable reception. This impression is balanced by an important account book kept by Georg Dollert, town notary in Sibiu at the end of the sixteenth century. He had a shop in the city and kept several inventories and ledgers with the merchandise in his stock, which consisted mainly of oriental goods. In one instance he even wrote down the name of the merchant from whom he had bought the stuff on 13 June 1597: Harttha from Târgoviște¹⁶. Harttha is fortunately recorded in the customs register from that year as well, under the same date¹⁷. A parallel between the two entries featuring Harttha

¹⁶ A. Scheiner, *Die Sprache des Teilschreibers Georg Dollert*, in "Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde", t. 47, 1933, no. 1-2, p. 81.

¹⁷ NAS, Inventory 197, no. 40 (1597), 6r.

from Târgoviște shows the discrepancy in the quantities and the types of goods he paid at the customs and those he sold to the Saxon, with the exception of pepper and square linen.

Table 6: Harttha's supply of goods in the customs registers and in Georg Dollert's ledger on 13 June 1597

Product	Customs duty	Quantity		Price	
		At the customs	In Dollert's shop	At the customs	In Dollert's shop
Pepper	lb. 6	lb. 120	lb. 91	fl. 0 d. 80	fl. 1 d. 03
Square linen	pc. 1	pc. 20	pc. 7	fl. 2	fl. 2 d. 45
Stramatura	pc. 1	pc. 20		fl. 0 d. 50	–
Headscarves	2	40		fl. 0 d. 20	–
Bags	16	320		fl. 0 d. 5	
Mesde slippers	1	20		fl. 0 d. 14	–
Rope			pc. 12	fl. 1	fl. 1 d. 15
Large towels			6		d. 50
Towels			22		d. 20
Small towels			19		d. 10

This coincidence of registration, although a single occurrence so far, is powerful evidence for my argument that Sibiu was a good market for oriental goods, and that the “Greeks” could make good business there in spite of the staple right and the harsh legal initiatives by Transylvanian authorities against them. As I have argued before, the staple and the deposit were not meant to keep these merchants away but to offer the Saxons the much-sought-after oriental goods in a competition-free environment and at advantageous prices. The difference between the customs prices and the sale prices of the oriental products in town is well illustrated by table 6. In this situation, the Saxon traders had a monopoly over the further distribution and sale of the oriental goods in their town to the locals and to other merchants as well.

Moving away from the customs registers, other primary sources help researchers unravel more about how trade and business took place on the Wallachian-Transylvanian segment of the long-distance trade between the Ottoman Empire and Central Europe. The correspondence preserved in the archives of the Saxon towns of Sibiu and Braşov and which covers roughly the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth centuries, sent by Wallachian officials but also by private persons, sheds light on the commercial practices that were in use between merchants as well as on the organisation of trade in the framework of privileges and administration of justice.

Several letters of complaint by Romanian princes to Sibiu and Braşov testify to the practice of credit operations in the form of sales credit and delayed

payments¹⁸. The Wallachian merchants were the intermediaries¹⁹ in this chain of credit since they took the oriental goods from the “Turks” (that is, merchants coming from the Ottoman Empire) on credit and forwarded them to the Saxons on credit. Thus, one particular amount of goods was sold on credit at least twice on this segment of the long-distance trade. Trouble arose when the Saxons, who were at the end of the Wallachian chain, failed to honour the debts on the agreed terms (*soroc*). There are no sources to support this conjecture but it is very likely that this chain of delayed payments was continued by the Saxon merchants as well, with their breach of payment agreement motivated by a similar break of trust with their partners in Transylvania²⁰. The best description of the entire mechanism is preserved in the letter of Prince Basarab cel Tânăr (1477-1482) sent to Braşov around 1480:

I let your lordships know that my traders who trade in goods had come and complained to me that after you bargain with them, you do not take their goods upon terms but you keep them there and do not pay them. But our traders take the goods from the Turks, who give them terms, and they cannot pay when the term comes because you do not pay them so they can pay off the Turks. And so these bring letters from the emperor (sultan – *n.M.P.W.*) and since our people cannot pay, we hand them over tied to the Turks. And this is how all my merchants have become poor, because you neither pay them, nor do you allow them to sell to other merchants in the Hungarian land. And then you do not allow them to return with the goods you do not like so they can give them back to whom they took them from, but you set fire to their pepper, and you want to kill them as you did with Dragota. ... So, your lordships should know how you shall agree with our merchants: you come and take the merchandise from our merchants at the border; our merchants will pay customs to the Turks and to us, and you will pay the Hungarians²¹.

A similar complaint can be read in a 1486 document of the Ottoman administration in Dubrovnik: local traders engaged in business agreements with “Turks and the other people” contracted debts and then had difficulties in recovering their money²².

¹⁸ See M.M. Postan, *Credit in Medieval Trade*, in *Medieval Trade and Finance*, Cambridge, 1973, p. 5-7, states that sale credits were a widely used instrument in medieval transactions as opposed to direct loans of money.

¹⁹ See also Anca Popescu, *Un centre commercial du Bas-Danube ottoman au XVIe siècle: Brăila (Bra'il)*, in “Il Mar Nero”, t. III, 1997–1998, p. 215, note 24.

²⁰ Credit was naturally a common practice in commercial transactions in Transylvania, too. Samuel Goldenberg has noted that certain written testimonials of credit were widespread in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: *Der Handel Transsilvaniens vom 14. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*, in “Scripta Mercaturae”, 1977, no. 11, p. 18.

²¹ Ioan Bogdan, *Documente și regeste privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Braşovul și cu Ungaria în secolele XV și XVI*, Bucureşti, 1902, doc. 104, p. 102-3 (hereinafter: *Regeste*). This letter is relevant to more commercial aspects than the one pointed out in the text: it also mentions how the staple right was applied by the Saxons.

²² Boško I. Bojović, *Raguse (Dubrovnik) et l'Empire Ottoman (1430–1520). Les actes imperiaux ottomans en vieux-serbe de Murad II à Selim Ier*, Paris, 1998, p. 290.

In the first decades of the sixteenth century, there is still documentary evidence in this correspondence that Wallachian merchants were buying goods on credit (*in credenciam*) from “Turks”²³.

Besides buying and selling of goods on credit, the network of business relations between individual merchants involved transaction costs such as transportation and finding lodging abroad. The extant source material does not provide exact data to allow us to calculate or at least approximate these transaction costs. However, the letters that constitute the basis for the present study document how personal connections were created along with merchandise transactions. Again, information appears only in letters protesting against broken trust and agreements. Merchants traveling abroad probably found lodging with persons who were also their business counterparts. The hosts (*gazda*) appear to be directly responsible for the goods that the merchants stored with them if they could not sell them during their stay. Neagoe of Măgureni, after receiving a seal for his goods and for two florins at the customs, did not take it along on his way back and was thus forced to pay duties again. His protector, a high official from Wallachia, pleaded the merchant’s case with the Braşov city fathers:

This man of mine from Măgureni, Neagoe, went there to Braşov to sell this and that because he is a merchant. Thus, he bought goods for two florins and had two florins (coins – *n.M.P.W.*), and he had a seal made for the florins and for the goods as well. But in the house where he was sheltered he looked in his bag, took out the seal and put it on a table, and so he forgot to take it.²⁴

If the previous letter was meant to testify to the good faith of the Wallachian merchant who had paid the customs duties and did not want to pay them twice, the letter of Neagoe Basarab addressed to the Sibiu citizens is the result of abuse:

I notify your Lordships about Dumitru from the citadel of Bucharest, and I have written to your Lordships before on his behalf. He had his merchandise pawned over there and sealed. The host tore off the seal and spent that merchandise and now will not pay him. And he (Dumitru – *n.M.P.W.*) came many times and he has spent enough money over this...²⁵

Wallachians in turn offered shelter to Ottoman merchants, as Rădilă of Câmpulung did. In his case, however, the involvement with “the Turk” got him into trouble. The 1482 letter sent to Braşov by Vlad Călugărul describes the misfortune of the Wallachian merchant because of the false testimony of two villains:

And you believed their (Coman and Barbat – *n.M.P.W.*) slander and did wrong to a just man: because you see, Rădilă was not guarantor for the Turk, he was only his host, and he had no other dealing with the Turk, because he was no guarantor for him²⁶.

²³ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/1, doc. 428, p. 234.

²⁴ Ioan Bogdan, *Documente privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Braşovul și cu Țara Ungurească în secolele XV și XVI*, București, 1902, doc. 245, pp. 300-301.

²⁵ Gr.G. Tocilescu, *354 documente istorice slavo-române din Țara Românească și Moldova privitoare la legăturile cu Ardealul, 1346–1603*, București, 1931, doc. 269, pp. 259-260.

²⁶ Bogdan, *Regeste*, doc. CXV, p. 115-116; Tocilescu, *op. cit.*, doc. 155, pp. 148-149.

After 1550, available published documents of this nature is scant and thus it is difficult to decide how these practices were continued or modified. The stronger presence of the alien merchants in the long-distance trade certainly created a different juridical situation: the Romanian princes had no longer jurisdiction over the traders who came from the Ottoman Empire. An extraordinary document preserved in the Sibiu archives does bring crucial information to complete our picture on the fate of the “Greek” merchants in the second half of the sixteenth century. It is a court case which was litigated in front of the city fathers of Tâlmăciu and then sent for appeal to the higher court in Sibiu in a matter involving two merchants in February 1561²⁷.

The Greek Panthaleon summoned to the court Konda the Greek, with whom “he had started a friendship since some time”. Panthaleon was also in debt to a Turkish merchant back in Wallachia but he was tied up in a deal with a merchant from Sibiu with whom he was supposed to ride to Şelimbăr. Thus, hearing that Konda was travelling to Wallachia, Panthaleon asked his friend whether he would take with him and give to his wife the money to pay the Turkish creditor. Panthaleon declared that they went together to his host in Thalmacz and there he gave Konda a pouch with 200 gold florins and 92 florins in various coins. After a while, Panthaleon learned that the money was never given to his wife and so he was seeking repayment. Konda acknowledged receiving money from Panthaleon, but none of it was gold, and that after he had taken back the 20 florins that Panthaleon had owed him, he returned the rest. Witnesses were called in. On Panthaleon’s side the host of the merchant and his wife gave their statements. They did see money given to Konda from a heavy bag but could not tell exactly how much, and also witnessed Panthaleon’s distress at the news that the money was not delivered to his wife in Wallachia. Konda had three witnesses, who gave completely different accounts of the events. A widowed woman, who was probably the merchant’s host or at least a frequent business partner but not mentioned either way in the prothocol, did not know anything specific about this deal, but she knew that “Konda had lent money often to Panthaleon, for purchases and for the customs duties”. The other two witnesses of Konda, one of them being another Greek, could only repeat the statement of the accused that he had paid back his debt to Panthaleon. The judges could not reach a sentence, and their decision was that Panthaleon had to swear again together with seven honest people that he indeed had given 200 gold florins and 92 more florins to Konda. At the second appeal, Panthaleon did not pursue this cause any longer and did not appear in court. Konda was declared free of any charges.

The Sibiu customs register of 1559-1560 records both merchants with consignments. “Konda de Ripes” (i.e. Râmnicu Vâlcea) paid customs duties twice: first on 1 August 1559 he gave 11 pounds of pepper, which means that he cleared

²⁷ NAS, Colecția documente medievale, U IV 886. A reference to this case was made Gustav Gündisch, *Peter Haller. Bürgermeister von Hermannstadt und Sachsengraf (1490 ?–1569)*, in “Deutsche Forschungen im Südosten”, 1944, no. 1, p. 72, note 85.

through the customs 220 pounds of spices worth 74 gold florins²⁸. His second trip to Tâlmăciu took place on 9 January 1560, and this time he carried a variety of goods: 260 pieces of bogasia (boucassin), 60 pieces of coloured bogasia, 20 pieces of “stramatura”, 20 bedcovers, 100 small belts, 40 pairs of boots, 20 fox furs, 20 pieces of black camelot, 100 pounds of cloves, 40 pounds of saffron, 100 pounds of pepper and 100 scarves²⁹. The total value of these goods is 530 gold florins.

“Pantholeon ausz dem Arges” (i.e. Curtea de Argeş) arrived at the customs in Tâlmăciu on 9 February 1560 and his stock was less impressive: 60 mantles, 40 pieces of aba, 240 pieces of “stramatura” and 400 leather bags³⁰, in a total value of 220 gold florins.

What conclusions can we draw from the dispute between Konda and Pantholeon? It is difficult to say why the latter initiated this lawsuit and then abandoned it. It is certain however that both were professional merchants, who did business in Wallachia and in Sibiu as well. The chain of credited buys and delayed payments which was already documented in the fifteenth century was continued by the “Greek” merchants who by this time had taken over the bulk of the oriental trade with Transylvania.

Moreover, this litigation provides strong evidence for the conjecture that the “Greek” merchants had built a network of support that actually secured their success³¹. Benjamin Braude wrote an article on the risks and profits of commercial enterprises in the Balkans, thus inevitably discussing the networks that were created by traders belonging to the strongest ethnic groups in this respect. He acknowledged that “the Greek trading network, though perhaps not as strong as the Jews within certain areas of the Empire and not as far-flung as the Armenians, was powerful and cohesive enough to last for centuries”³².

The case of Pantholeon and Konda reveals an instance when something went wrong between the two merchants who had previously worked together. The support these merchants gave one another reached beyond the business transactions and money lending. The service Pantholeon trusted his friend was probably not an unusual favour.

Through the stipulations of Sibiu’s privilege of the staple right, the foreign merchants were not allowed in the city, therefore they conducted their affairs in Tâlmăciu, where the deposit of their goods was set up. The “Greeks” selling their oriental goods here were in the position to find good partners in Sibiu, either merchants who had free access to the fairs in the region or shopkeepers from town. The sum of 200 florins which was in dispute between Konda and Pantholeon, as well as the income they could produce on their consignments of oriental goods attest the financial ability of these merchants.

²⁸ NAS, Inventory 197, no. 28, 2r.

²⁹ Calculation based on the entry in the 1559 customs register: NAS, Inventory 197, no. 28, 5v.

³⁰ Calculation based on the entry in the 1559 customs register: NAS, Inventory 197, no. 28, 6v.

³¹ See Pakucs Willcocks, “Greek” Merchants, p. 110.

³² Benjamin Braude, *Venture and Faith in the Commercial Life of the Ottoman Balkans, 1500–1650*, in “The International History Review”, t. VII, 1985, no. 4, p. 535.